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THE POETICAL WORKS

of

ROBERT BROWNING

VOL. VII.

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

THE AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS

PACCHIAROTTO

AND

HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER

WITH OTHER POEMS.

New York
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1894

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ROBERT BROWNING

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LUKOS

HERAKLES

IRIS

LUTTA (*Madness*)

Messenger

THESEUS

Choros of Aged Thebans

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY;

INCLUDING

A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES:

BEING THE

LAST ADVENTURE OF BALAUSTION.

οὐκ ἔσθω κενέβρει· ὁπόταν δὲ θύῃς τι, κάλει με.

I eat no carrion; when you sacrifice
Some cleanly creature—call me for a slice!

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY.

1875.

Wind, wave, and bark, bear Euthukles and me,
Balaustion, from—not sorrow but despair,
Not memory but the present and its pang!
Athenai, live thou hearted in my heart:
Never, while I live, may I see thee more,
Never again may these repugnant orbs
Ache themselves blind before the hideous pomp,
The ghastly mirth which mocked thine overthrow
—Death's entry, Haides' outrage!
Doomed to die,—
Fire should have flung a passion of embrace
About thee till, resplendently inarmed,
(Temple by temple folded to his breast,
All thy white wonder fainting out in ash)
Lightly some vaporous sigh of soul escaped,
And so the Immortals bade Athenai back!
Or earth might sunder and absorb thee, save,

Buried below Olumpos and its gods,
Akropolis to dominate her realm
For Koré, and console the ghosts; or, sea,
What if thy watery plural vastitude,
Rolling unanimous advance, had rushed,
Might upon might, a moment,—stood, one stare,
Sea-face to city-face, thy glaucous wave
Glassing that marbled last magnificence,—
Till fate's pale tremulous foam-flower tipped the grey,
And when wave broke and overswarmed and, sucked
To bounds back, multitudinously ceased,
Let land again breathe unconfused with sea,
Attiké was, Athenai was not now!

Such end I could have borne, for I had shared.
But this which, glanced at, aches within my orbs
To blinding,—bear me thence, bark, wind and wave!
Me, Euthukles, and, hearted in each heart,
Athenai, undisgraced as Pallas' self,
Bear to my birthplace, Helios' island-bride,
Zeus' darling: thither speed us, homeward-bound,
Wafted already twelve hours' sail away
From horror, nearer by one sunset Rhodes!

Why should despair be? Since, distinct above
Man's wickedness and folly, flies the wind

And floats the cloud, free transport for our soul
Out of its fleshly durance dim and low,—
Since disembodied soul anticipates
(Thought-borne as now, in rapturous unrestraint)
Above all crowding, crystal silentness,
Above all noise, a silver solitude:—
Surely, where thought so bears soul, soul in time
May permanently bide, "assert the wise,"
There live in peace, there work in hope once more—
O nothing doubt, Philemon! Greed and strife,
Hatred and cark and care, what place have they
In yon blue liberality of heaven?
How the sea helps! How rose-smit earth will rise
Breast-high thence, some bright morning, and be
Rhodes!
Heaven, earth and sea, my warrant—in their name,
Believe—o'er falsehood, truth is surely sphered,
O'er ugliness beams beauty, o'er this world
Extends that realm where, "as the wise assert,"
Philemon, thou shalt see Euripides
Clearer than mortal sense perceived the man!

A sunset nearer Rhodes, by twelve hours' sweep
Of surge secured from horror? Rather say,
Quieted out of weakness into strength.
I dare invite, survey the scene my sense

Staggered to apprehend: for, disenvolved
From the mere outside anguish and contempt,
Slowly a justice centred in a doom
Reveals itself. Ay, pride succumbed to pride,
Oppression met the oppressor and was matched.
Athenai's vaunt braved Sparté's violence
Till, in the shock, prone fell Peiraios, low
Rampart and bulwark lay, as,—timing stroke
Of hammer, axe, and beam hoist, poised and swung,—
The very flute-girls blew their laughing best,
In dance about the conqueror while he bade
Music and merriment help enginery
Batter down, break to pieces all the trust
Of citizens once, slaves now. See what walls
Play substitute for the long double range
Themistoklean, heralding a guest
From harbour on to citadel! Each side
Their senseless walls demolished stone by stone,
See,—outer wall as stonelike,—heads and hearts,—
Athenai's terror-stricken populace!
Prattlers, tongue-tied in crouching abjectness,—
Braggarts, who wring hands wont to flourish swords—
Sophist and rhetorician, demagogue,
(Argument dumb, authority a jest)
Dikast and heliast, pleader, litigant,
Quack-priest, sham-prophecy-retailer, scout

O' the customs, sycophant, whate'er the style,
Altar-scrap-snatcher, pimp and parasite,—
Rivalities at truce now each with each,
Stupefied mud-banks,—such an use they serve!
While the one order which performs exact
To promise, functions faithful last as first,
What is it but the city's lyric troop,
Chantress and psaltress, flute-girl, dancing-girl?
Athenai's harlotry takes laughing care
Their patron miss no pipings, late she loved,
But deathward tread at least the kordax-step.

Die then, who pulled such glory on your heads!
There let it grind to powder! Perikles!
The living are the dead now: death be life!
Why should the sunset yonder waste its wealth?
Prove thee Olympian! If my heart supply
Inviolate the structure,—true to type,
Build me some spirit-place no flesh shall find,
As Pheidias may inspire thee: slab on slab,
Renew Athenai, quarry out the cloud,
Convert to gold yon west extravagance!
'Neath Propulaia, from Akropolis
By vapoury grade and grade, gold all the way,
Step to thy snow-Pnux, mount thy Bema-cloud,
Thunder and lighten thence a Hellas through

That shall be better and more beautiful
And too august for Sparté's foot to spurn!
Chasmed in the crag, again our Theatre
Predominates, one purple: Staghunt-month,
Brings it not Dionusia? Hail, the Three!
Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides
Compete, gain prize or lose prize, godlike still.
Nay, lest they lack the old god-exercise—
Their noble want the unworthy,—as of old,
(How otherwise should patience crown their might?)
What if each find his ape promoted man,
His censor raised for antic service still?
Some new Hermippos to pelt Perikles,
Kratinos to swear Pheidias robbed a shrine,
Eruxis—I suspect, Euripides,
No brow will ache because with mop and mow
He gibes my poet! There 's a dog-faced dwarf
That gets to godship somehow, yet retains
His apehood in the Egyptian hierarchy,
More decent, indecorous just enough:
Why should not dog-ape, graced in due degree,
Grow Momos as thou Zeus? Or didst thou sigh
Rightly with thy Makaria? "After life,
Better no sentiency than turbulence;
Death cures the low contention." Be it so!
Yet progress means contention, to my mind.

Euthukles, who, except for love that speaks,
Art silent by my side while words of mine
Provoke that foe from which escape is vain
Henceforward, wake Athenai's fate and fall,—
Memories asleep as, at the altar-foot
Those Furies in the Oresteian song,—
Do I amiss who, wanting strength, use craft,
Advance upon the foe I cannot fly,
Nor feign a snake is dormant though it gnaw?
That fate and fall, once bedded in our brain,
Roots itself past upwrenching; but coaxed forth,
Encouraged out to practise fork and fang,—
Perhaps, when satiate with prompt sustenance,
It may pine, likelier die than if left swell
In peace by our pretension to ignore,
Or pricked to threefold fury, should our stamp
Bruise and not brain the pest.

A middle course!
What hinders that we treat this tragic theme
As the Three taught when either woke some woe,
—How Klutaimnestra hated, what the pride
Of Iokasté, why Medeia clove
Nature asunder. Small rebuked by large,
We felt our puny hates refine to air,
Our poor prides sink, prevent the humbling hand,

Our petty passions purify their tide.
So, Euthukles, permit the tragedy
To re-enact itself, this voyage through,
Till sunsets end and sunrise brighten Rhodes!
Majestic on the stage of memory,
Peplosed and kothorned, let Athenai fall
Once more, nay, oft again till life conclude,
Lent for the lesson: Choros, I and thou!
What else in life seems piteous any more
After such pity, or proves terrible
Beside such terror?

Still—since Phrunichos
Offended, by too premature a touch
Of that Milesian smart-place freshly frayed—
(Ah, my poor people, whose prompt remedy
Was—fine the poet, not reform thyself!)
Beware precipitate approach! Rehearse
Rather the prologue, well a year away,
Than the main misery, a sunset old.
What else but fitting prologue to the piece
Style an adventure, stranger than my first
By so much as the issue it enwombed
Lurked big beyond Balaustion's littleness?
Second supreme adventure! O that Spring,
That eve I told the earlier to my friends!

Where are the four now, with each red-ripe mouth
Crumpled so close, no quickest breath it fetched
Could disengage the lip-flower furled to bud
For fear Admetos,—shivering head and foot,
As with sick soul and blind averted face
He trusted hand forth to obey his friend,—
Should find no wife in her cold hand's response,
Nor see the disenshrouded statue start
Alkestis, live the life and love the love!
I wonder, does the streamlet ripple still,
Outsmoothing galingale and watermint
Its mat-floor? while at brim, 'twixt sedge and sedge,
What bubblings past Baccheion, broadened much,
Pricked by the reed and fretted by the fly,
Oared by the boatman-spider's pair of arms!
Lenaia was a gladsome month ago—
Euripides had taught "Andromedé:"
Next month, would teach "Kresphontes"—which same month
Someone from Phokis, who companioned me
Since all that happened on those temple-steps,
Would marry me and turn Athenian too.
Now! if next year the masters let the slaves
Do Bacchic service and restore mankind
That trilogy whereof, 't is noised, one play
Presents the Bacchai,—no Euripides

Will teach the choros, nor shall we be tinged
By any such grand sunset of his soul,
Exiles from dead Athenai,—not the live
That 's in the cloud there with the new-born star!

Speak to the infinite intelligence,
Sing to the everlasting sympathy!
Winds belly sail, and drench of dancing brine
Buffet our boat-side, so the prore bound free!
Condense our voyage into one great day
Made up of sunset-closes: eve by eve,
Resume that memorable night-discourse
When,—like some meteor-brilliance, fire and filth,
Or say, his own Amphitheos, deity
And dung, who, bound on the gods' embassage,
Got men's acknowledgment in kick and cuff—
We made acquaintance with a visitor
Ominous, apparitional, who went
Strange as he came, but shall not pass away.
Let us attempt that memorable talk,
Clothe the adventure's every incident
With due expression: may not looks be told,
Gesture made speak, and speech so amplified
That words find blood-warmth which, cold-writ, they lose?

Recall the night we heard the news from Thrace,

One year ago, Athenai still herself.

We two were sitting silent in the house,
Yet cheerless hardly. Euthukles, forgive!
I somehow speak to unseen auditors.
Not *you*, but—Euthukles had entered, grave,
Grand, may I say, as who brings laurel-branch
And message from the tripod: such it proved.

He first removed the garland from his brow,
Then took my hand and looked into my face.

"Speak good words!" much misgiving faltered I.

"Good words, the best, Balaustion! He is crowned,
Gone with his Attic ivy home to feast,
Since Aischulos required companionship.
Pour a libation for Euripides!"

When we had sat the heavier silence out—
"Dead and triumphant still!" began reply
To my eye's question. "As he willed he worked:
And, as he worked, he wanted not, be sure,
Triumph his whole life through, submitting work
To work's right judges, never to the wrong—
To competency, not ineptitude.

When he had run life's proper race and worked
Quite to the stade's end, there remained to try
The stade's turn, should strength dare the double course.
Half the diaulos reached, the hundred plays
Accomplished, force in its rebound sufficed
To lift along the athlete and ensure
A second wreath, proposed by fools for first,
The statist's olive as the poet's bay.
Wiselier, he suffered not a twofold aim
Retard his pace, confuse his sight; at once
Poet and statist; though the multitude
Girded him ever 'All thine aim thine art?
The idle poet only? No regard
For civic duty, public service, here?
We drop our ballot-bean for Sophokles!
Not only could he write "Antigoné,"
But—since (we argued) whoso penned that piece
Might just as well conduct a squadron,—straight
Good-naturedly he took on him command,
Got laughed at, and went back to making plays,
Having allowed us our experiment
Respecting the fit use of faculty.'
No whit the more did athlete slacken pace.
Soon the jeers grew: 'Cold hater of his kind,
A sea-cave suits him, not the vulgar hearth!

What need of tongue-talk, with a bookish store
Would stock ten cities?' Shadow of an ass!
No whit the worse did athlete touch the mark
And, at the turning-point, consign his scorn
O' the scorners to that final trilogy
'Hupsipule,' 'Phoinissai,' and the Match
Of Life Contemplative with Active Life,
Zethos against Amphion. Ended so?
Nowise!—began again; for heroes rest
Dropping shield's oval o'er the entire man,
And he who thus took Contemplation's prize
Turned stade-point but to face Activity.
Out of all shadowy hands extending help
For life's decline pledged to youth's labour still,
Whatever renovation flatter age,—
Society with pastime, solitude
With peace,—he chose the hand that gave the heart,
Bade Macedonian Archelaos take
The leavings of Athenai, ash once flame.
For fifty politicians' frosty work,
One poet's ash proved ample and to spare:
He propped the state and filled the treasury,
Counselled the king as might a meaner soul,
Furnished the friend with what shall stand in stead
Of crown and sceptre, star his name about
When these are dust; for him, Euripides

Last the old hand on the old phorminx flung,
Clashed thence 'Alkaion,' maddened 'Pentheus' up;
Then music sighed itself away, one moan
Iphigeneia made by Aulis' strand;
With her and music died Euripides.

"The poet-friend who followed him to Thrace,
Agathon, writes thus much: the merchant-ship
Moreover brings a message from the king
To young Euripides, who went on board
This morning at Mounuchia: all is true."

I said "Thank Zeus for the great news and good!"

"Nay, the report is running in brief fire
Through the town's stubbly furrow," he resumed:
—"Entertains brightly what their favourite styles
'The City of Gapers' for a week perhaps,
Supplants three luminous tales, but yesterday
Pronounced sufficient lamps to last the month:
How Glauketes, outbidding Morsimos,
Paid market-price for one Kopaic eel
A thousand drachmai, and then cooked his prize
Not proper conger-fashion but in oil
And nettles, as man fries the foam-fish-kind;
How all the captains of the triremes, late

Victors at Arginousai, on return
Will, for reward, be straightway put to death;
How Mikon wagered a Thessalian mime
Trained him by Lais, looked on as complete,
Against Leogoras' blood-mare koppa-marked,
Valued six talents,—swore, accomplished so,
The girl could swallow at a draught, nor breathe,
A choinix of unmixed Mendesian wine;
And having lost the match will—dine on herbs!
Three stories late a-flame, at once extinct,
Outblazed by just 'Euripides is dead'!

"I met the concourse from the Theatre,
The audience flocking homeward: victory
Again awarded Aristophanes
Precisely for his old play chopped and changed
'The Female Celebrators of the Feast'—
That Thesmophoria, tried a second time.
'Never such full success!'—assured the folk,
Who yet stopped praising to have word of mouth
With 'Euthukles, the bard's own intimate,
Balaustion's husband, the right man to ask.'

"'Dead, yes, but how dead, may acquaintance know?
You were the couple constant at his cave:
Tell us now, is it true that women, moved

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By reason of his liking Krateros . . .'

"I answered 'He was loved by Sokrates.'

"'Nay,' said another, 'envy did the work!
For, emulating poets of the place,
One Arridaios, one Krateues, both
Established in the royal favour, these . . .'

"Protagoras instructed him," said I.

"'*Phu*,' whistled Comic Platon, 'hear the fact!
'T was well said of your friend by Sophokles
"He hate our women? In his verse, belike:
But when it comes to prose-work,—ha, ha, ha!"
New climes don't change old manners: so, it chanced,
Pursuing an intrigue one moonless night
With Arethousian Nikodikos' wife,
(Come now, his years were simply seventy-five)
Crossing the palace-court, what haps he on
But Archelaos' pack of hungry hounds?
Who tore him piecemeal ere his cry brought help.'

"I asked: Did not you write 'The Festivals'?
You best know what dog tore him when alive.
You others, who now make a ring to hear,

Have not you just enjoyed a second treat,
Proclaimed that ne'er was play more worthy prize
Than this, myself assisted at, last year,
And gave its worth to,—spitting on the same?
Appraise no poetry,—price cuttlefish,
Or that seaweed-alphestes, scorpion-sort,
Much famed for mixing mud with fantasy
On midnights! I interpret no foul dreams."

If so said Euthukles, so could not I,
Balaustion, say. After "Lusistraté"
No more for me of "people's privilege,"
No witnessing "the Grand old Comedy
Coëval with our freedom, which, curtailed,
Were freedom's deathblow: relic of the past,
When Virtue laughingly told truth to Vice,
Uncensured, since the stern mouth, stuffed with
flowers,
Through poetry breathed satire, perfumed blast
Which sense snuffed up while searched unto the
bone!"
I was a stranger: "For first joy," urged friends,
"Go hear our Comedy, some patriot piece
That plies the selfish advocates of war
With argument so unevadable
That crash fall Kleons whom the finer play

Of reason, tickling, deeper wounds no whit
Than would a spear-thrust from a savory-stalk!
No: you hear knave and fool told crime and fault,
And see each scourged his quantity of stripes.
'Rough dealing, awkward language,' whine our fops:
The world 's too squeamish now to bear plain words
Concerning deeds it acts with gust enough:
But, thanks to wine-lees and democracy,
We 've still our stage where truth calls spade a spade!
Ashamed? Phuromachos' decree provides
The sex may sit discreetly, witness all,
Sorted, the good with good, the gay with gay,
Themselves unseen, no need to force a blush.
A Rhodian wife and ignorant so long?
Go hear next play!"
I heard "Lusistraté."
Waves, said to wash pollution from the world,
Take that plague-memory, cure that pustule caught
As, past escape, I sat and saw the piece
By one appalled at Phaidra's fate,—the chaste,
Whom, because chaste, the wicked goddess chained
To that same serpent of unchastity
She loathed most, and who, coiled so, died distraught
Rather than make submission, loose one limb
Love-wards, at lambency of honeyed tongue,
Or torture of the scales which scraped her snow

—I say, the piece by him who charged this piece
(Because Euripides shrank not to teach,
If gods be strong and wicked, man, though weak,
May prove their match by willing to be good)
With infamies the Scythian's whip should cure—
"Such outrage done the public—Phaidra named!
Such purpose to corrupt ingenuous youth,
Such insult cast on female character!"—
Why, when I saw that bestiality—
So beyond all brute-beast imagining,
That when, to point the moral at the close,
Poor Salabaccho, just to show how fair
Was "Reconciliation," stripped her charms,
That exhibition simply bade us breathe,
Seemed something healthy and commendable
After obscenity grotesqued so much
It slunk away revolted at itself.
Henceforth I had my answer when our sage
Pattern-proposing seniors pleaded grave
"You fail to fathom here the deep design!
All 's acted in the interest of truth,
Religion, and those manners old and dear
Which made our city great when citizens
Like Aristeides and like Miltiades
Wore each a golden tettix in his hair."
What do they wear now under—Kleophon?

Well, for such reasons,—I am out of breath,
But loathsomeness we needs must hurry past,—
I did not go to see, nor then nor now,
The "Thesmophoriazousai." But, since males
Choose to brave first, blame afterward, nor brand
Without fair taste of what they stigmatize,
Euthukles had not missed the first display,
Original portrait of Euripides
By "Virtue laughingly reproving Vice":
"Virtue,"—the author, Aristophanes,
Who mixed an image out of his own depths,
Ticketed as I tell you. Oh, this time
No more pretension to recondite worth!
No joke in aid of Peace, no demagogue
Pun-pelleted from Pnux, no kordax-dance
Overt helped covertly the Ancient Faith!
All now was muck, home-produce, honestman
The author's soul secreted to a play
Which gained the prize that day we heard the death.

I thought "How thoroughly death alters things!
Where is the wrong now, done our dead and great?
How natural seems grandeur in relief,
Cliff-base with frothy spites against its calm!"

Euthukles interposed—he read my thought—

"O'er them, too, in a moment came the change.
The crowd 's enthusiastic, to a man:
Since, rake as such may please the ordure-heap
Because of certain sparkles presumed ore,
At first flash of true lightning overhead,
They look up, nor resume their search too soon.
The insect-scattering sign is evident,
And nowhere winks a fire-fly rival now,
Nor bustles any beetle of the brood
With trundled dung-ball meant to menace heaven.
Contrariwise, the cry is 'Honour him!'
'A statue in the theatre!' wants one;
Another 'Bring the poet's body back,
Bury him in Peiraios: o'er his tomb
Let Alkamenes carve the music-witch,
The songstress-seiren, meed of melody:
Thoukudides invent his epitaph!'
To-night the whole town pays its tribute thus."

Our tribute should not be the same, my friend!
Statue? Within our heart he stood, he stands!
As for the vest outgrown now by the form,
Low flesh that clothed high soul,—a vesture's fate—
Why, let it fade, mix with the elements
There where it, falling, freed Euripides!
But for the soul that 's tutelary now

Till time end, o'er the world to teach and bless—
How better hail its freedom than by first
Singing, we two, its own song back again,
Up to that face from which flowed beauty—face
Now abler to see triumph and take love
Than when it glorified Athenai once?

The sweet and strange Alkestis, which saved me,
Secured me—you, ends nowise, to my mind,
In pardon of Admetos. Hearts are fain
To follow cheerful weary Herakles
Striding away from the huge gratitude,
Club shouldered, lion-fleece round loin and flank,
Bound on the next new labour "height o'er height
Ever surmounting,—destiny's decree!"
Thither He helps us: that 's the story's end;
He smiling said so, when I told him mine—
My great adventure, how Alkestis helped.
Afterward, when the time for parting fell,
He gave me, with two other precious gifts,
This third and best, consummating the grace
"Herakles," writ by his own hand, each line.

"If it have worth, reward is still to seek.
Somebody, I forget who, gained the prize
And proved arch-poet: time must show!" he smiled:

"Take this, and, when the noise tires out, judge me—
Some day, not slow to dawn, when somebody—
Who? I forget—proves nobody at all!"

Is not that day come? What if you and I
Re-sing the song, inaugurate the fame?
We have not waited to acquaint ourselves
With song and subject; we can prologuize
How, at Eurustheus' bidding,—hate strained hard,—
Herakles had departed, one time more,
On his last labour, worst of all the twelve;
Descended into Haides, thence to drag
The triple-headed hound, which sun should see
Spite of the god whose darkness whelped the Fear.
Down went the hero, "back—how should he come?"
So laughed King Lukos, an old enemy,
Who judged that absence testified defeat
Of the land's loved one,—since he saved the land
And for that service wedded Megara
Daughter of Thebai, realm her child should rule.
Ambition, greed and malice seized their prey,
The Heracleian House, defenceless left,
Father and wife and child, to trample out
Trace of its hearth-fire: since extreme old age
Wakes pity, woman's wrong wins championship,
And child may grow up man and take revenge.

Hence see we that, from out their palace-home
Hunted, for last resource they cluster now
Couched on the cold ground, hapless supplicants
About their courtyard altar,—Household Zeus
It is, the Three in funeral garb beseech,
Delaying death so, till deliverance come—
When did it ever?—from the deep and dark.
And thus breaks silence old Amphitruon's voice. . . .
Say I not true thus far, my Euthukles?

Suddenly, torch-light! knocking at the door,
Loud, quick, "Admittance for the revels' lord!"
Some unintelligible Komos-cry—
Raw-flesh red, no cap upon his head,
Dionusos, Bacchos, Phales, Iacchos,
In let him reel with the kid-skin at his heel,
Where it buries in the spread of the bushy myrtle-bed!
(Our Rhodian Jackdaw-song was sense to that!)
Then laughter, outbursts ruder and more rude,
Through which, with silver point, a fluting pierced,
And ever "Open, open, Bacchos bids!"

But at last—one authoritative word,
One name of an immense significance:
For Euthukles rose up, threw wide the door.

There trooped the Choros of the Comedy
Crowned and triumphant; first, those flushed Fifteen
Men that wore women's garb, grotesque disguise.
Then marched the Three,—who played Mnesilochos,
Who, Toxotes, and who, robed right, masked rare,
Monkeyed our Great and Dead to heart's content
That morning in Athenai. Masks were down
And robes doffed now; the sole disguise was drink.

Mixing with these—I know not what gay crowd,
Girl-dancers, flute-boys, and pre-eminent
Among them,—doubtless draped with such reserve
As stopped fear of the fifty-drachma fine
(Beside one's name on public fig-tree nailed)
Which women pay who in the streets walk bare,—
Behold Elaphion of the Persic dance!
Who lately had frisked fawn-foot, and the rest,
—All for the Patriot Cause, the Antique Faith,
The Conservation of True Poesy—
Could I but penetrate the deep design!
Elaphion, more Peiraios-known as "Phaps,"
Tripped at the head of the whole banquet-band
Who came in front now, as the first fell back;
And foremost—the authoritative voice,
The revels-leader, he who gained the prize,
And got the glory of the Archon's feast—

There stood in person Aristophanes.

And no ignoble presence! On the bulge
Of the clear baldness,—all his head one brow,—
True, the veins swelled, blue network, and there surged
A red from cheek to temple,—then retired
As if the dark-leaved chaplet damped a flame,—
Was never nursed by temperance or health.
But huge the eyeballs rolled back native fire,
Imperiously triumphant: nostrils wide
Waited their incense; while the pursed mouth's pout
Aggressive, while the beak supreme above,
While the head, face, nay, pillared throat thrown back,
Beard whitening under like a vinous foam,
These made a glory, of such insolence—
I thought,—such domineering deity
Hephaistos might have carved to cut the brine
For his gay brother's prow, imbrue that path
Which, purpling, recognized the conqueror.
Impudent and majestic: drunk, perhaps,
But that 's religion; sense too plainly snuffed:
Still, sensuality was grown a rite.

What I had disbelieved most proved most true.
There was a mind here, mind a-wantoning
At ease of undisputed mastery

Over the body's brood, those appetites.
Oh but he grasped them grandly, as the god
His either struggling handful,—hurtless snakes
Held deep down, strained hard off from side and side!
Mastery his, theirs simply servitude,
So well could firm fist help intrepid eye.
Fawning and fulsome, had they licked and hissed?
At mandate of one muscle, order reigned.
They had been wreathing much familiar now
About him on his entry; but a squeeze
Choked down the pests to place: their lord stood free.

Forward he stepped: I rose and fronted him.

"Hail, house, the friendly to Euripides!"
(So he began) "Hail, each inhabitant!
You, lady? What, the Rhodian? Form and face,
Victory's self upsoaring to receive
The poet? Right they named you . . some rich name,
Vowel-buds thorned about with consonants,
Fragrant, felicitous, rose-glow enriched
By the Isle's unguent: some diminished end
In *ion*, Kallistion? delicater still,
Kubelion or Melittion,—or, suppose
(Less vulgar love than bee or violet)
Phibalion, for the mouth split red-fig-wise,

Korakinìdion for the coal-black hair,
Nettarion, Phabion for the darlingness?
But no, it was some fruit-flower, Rhoidion . . . ha,
We near the balsam-bloom—Balaustion! Thanks,
Rhodes! Folk have called me Rhodian, do you know?
Not fools so far! Because, if Helios wived,
As Pindáros sings somewhere prettily,
Here blooms his offspring, earth-flesh with sun-fire,
Rhodes' blood and Helios' gold. My phorminx, boy!
Why does the boy hang back and baulk an ode
Tiptoe at spread of wing? But like enough,
Sunshine frays torchlight. Witness whom you scare,
Superb Balaustion! Look outside the house!
Pho, you have quenched my Komos by first frown
Struck dead all joyance: not a fluting puffs
From idle cheekband! Ah, my Choros too?
You 've eaten cuckoo-apple? Dumb, you dogs?
So much good Thasian wasted on your throats
And out of them not one *Threttanelo?*
Neblaretai! Because this earth-and-sun
Product looks wormwood and all bitter herbs?
Well, do I blench, though me she hates the most
Of mortals? By the cabbage, off they slink!
You, too, my Chrusomelolonthion-Phaps,
Girl-goldling-beetle-beauty? You, abashed,
Who late, supremely unabashable,

Propped up my play at that important point
When Artamouxia tricks the Toxotes?
Ha, ha,—thank Hermes for the lucky throw,—
We came last comedy of the whole seven,
So went all fresh to judgment well-disposed
For who should fatly feast them, eye and ear,
We two between us! What, you fail your friend?
Away then, free me of your cowardice!
Go, get you the goat's breakfast! Fare afield,
Ye circumcised of Egypt, pigs to sow,
Back to the Priest's or forward to the crows,
So you but rid me of such company!
Once left alone, I can protect myself
From statuesque Balaustion pedestalled
On much disapprobation and mistake!
She dares not beat the sacred brow, beside!
Bacchos' equipment, ivy safeguards well
As Phoibos' bay.

"They take me at my word!
One comfort is, I shall not want them long,
The Archon's cry creaks, creaks, 'Curtail expense!'
The war wants money, year the twenty-sixth!
Cut down our Choros number, clip costume,
Save birds' wings, beetles' armour, spend the cash
In three-crest skull-caps, three days' salt-fish-slice,

Three-banked-ships for these sham-ambassadors,
And what not: any cost but Comedy's!
'No Choros'—soon will follow; what care I?
Archinos and Agurrhios, scrape your flint,
Flay your dead dog, and curry favour so!
Choros in rags, with loss of leather next,
We lose the boys' vote, lose the song and dance,
Lose my Elaphion! Still, the actor stays.
Save but my acting, and the baldhead bard
Kudathenaian and Pandionid,
Son of Philippos, Aristophanes
Surmounts his rivals now as heretofore,
Though stinted to mere sober prosy verse—
'Manners and men,' so squeamish gets the world!
No more 'Step forward, strip for anapæsts!'
No calling naughty people by their names,
No tickling audience into gratitude
With chickpease, barleygroats and nuts and plums,
No setting Salabaccho . . ."

As I turned—

"True, lady, I am tolerably drunk:
The proper inspiration! Otherwise,—
Phrunichos, Choirilos!—had Aischulos
So foiled you at the goat-song? Drink 's a god.

How else did that old doating driveller
Kratinos foil me, match my masterpiece
The 'Clouds'? I swallowed cloud-distilment—dew
Undimmed by any grape-blush, knit my brow
And gnawed my style and laughed my learnedest;
While he worked at his 'Willow-wicker-flask,'
Swigging at that same flask by which he swore,
Till, sing and empty, sing and fill again,
Somehow result was—what it should not be
Next time, I promised him and kept my word!
Hence, brimful now of Thasian . . . I 'll be bound,
Mendesian, merely: triumph-night, you know,
The High Priest entertains the conqueror,
And, since war worsens all things, stingily
The rascal starves whom he is bound to stuff,
Choros and actors and their lord and king
The poet; supper, still he needs must spread—
And this time all was conscientious fare:
He knew his man, his match, his master—made
Amends, spared neither fish, flesh, fowl nor wine:
So merriment increased, I promise you,
Till—something happened."

Here he strangely paused.

"After that,—well, it either was the cup

To the Good Genius, our concluding pledge,
That wrought me mischief, decently unmixed,—
Or, what if, when *that* happened, need arose
Of new libation? Did you only know
What happened! Little wonder I am drunk."

Euthukles, o'er the boat-side, quick, what change,
Watch, in the water! But a second since,
It laughed a ripply spread of sun and sea,
Ray fused with wave, to never disunite.
Now, sudden all the surface, hard and black,
Lies a quenched light, dead motion: what the cause?
Look up and lo, the menace of a cloud
Has solemnized the sparkling, spoiled the sport!
Just so, some overshadow, some new care
Stopped all the mirth and mocking on his face
And left there only such a dark surmise
—No wonder if the revel disappeared,
So did his face shed silence every side!
I recognized a new man fronting me.

"So!" he smiled, piercing to my thought at once,
"You see myself? Balaustion's fixed regard
Can strip the proper Aristophanes
Of what our sophists, in their jargon, style
His accidents? My soul sped forth but now

To meet your hostile survey,—soul unseen,
Yet veritably cinct for soul-defence
With satyr sportive quips, cranks, boss and spike,
Just as my visible body paced the street,
Environed by a boon companionship
Your apparition also puts to flight.
Well, what care I if, unaccoutred twice,
I front my foe—no comicality
Round soul, and body-guard in banishment?
Thank your eyes' searching, undisguised I stand:
The merest female child may question me.
Spare not, speak bold, Balaustion!"

I did speak:

"Bold speech be—welcome to this honoured hearth,
Good Genius! Glory of the poet, glow
O' the humourist who castigates his kind,
Suave summer-lightning lambency which plays
On stag-horned tree, misshapen crag askew,
Then vanishes with unvindictive smile
After a moment's laying black earth bare.
Splendour of wit that springs a thunderball—
Satire—to burn and purify the world,
True aim, fair purpose: just wit justly strikes
Injustice,—right, as rightly quells the wrong,

Finds out in knaves', fools', cowards' armoury
The tricky tinselled place fire flashes through,
No damage else, sagacious of true ore;
Wit, learned in the laurel, leaves each wreath
O'er lyric shell or tragic barbiton,—
Though alien gauds be singed,—undesecrate,
The genuine solace of the sacred brow.
Ay, and how pulses flame a patriot-star
Steadfast athwart our country's night of things,
To beacon, would she trust no meteor-blaze,
Athenai from the rock she steers for straight!
O light, light, light, I hail light everywhere,
No matter for the murk that was,—perchance,
That will be,—certes, never should have been
Such orb's associate!

"Aristophanes!
'The merest female child may question you?'
Once, in my Rhodes, a portent of the wave
Appalled our coast: for many a darkened day,
Intolerable mystery and fear.
Who snatched a furtive glance through crannied peak,
Could but report of snake-scale, lizard-limb,—
So swam what, making whirlpools as it went,
Madded the brine with wrath or monstrous sport.
"'T is Tuphon, loose, unmanacled from mount,'

Declared the priests, 'no way appeasable
Unless perchance by virgin-sacrifice!'
Thus grew the terror and o'erhung the doom—
Until one eve a certain female-child
Strayed in safe ignorance to seacoast edge,
And there sat down and sang to please herself.
When all at once, large-looming from his wave,
Out leaned, chin hand-propped, pensive on the ledge,
A sea-worn face, sad as mortality,
Divine with yearning after fellowship.
He rose but breast-high. So much god she saw;
So much she sees now, and does reverence!"

Ah, but there followed tail-splash, frisk of fin!
Let cloud pass, the sea's ready laugh outbreaks.
No very godlike trace retained the mouth
Which mocked with—

"So, He taught you tragedy!
I always asked 'Why may not women act?'
Nay, wear the comic visor just as well;
Or, better, quite cast off the face-disguise
And voice-distortion, simply look and speak,
Real women playing women as men—men!
I shall not wonder if things come to that,
Some day when I am distant far enough.

Do you conceive the quite new Comedy
When laws allow? laws only let girls dance,
Pipe, posture,—above all, Elaphionize,
Provided they keep decent—that is, dumb.
Ay, and, conceiving, I would execute,
Had I but two lives: one were overworked!
How penetrate encrusted prejudice,
Pierce ignorance three generations thick
Since first Sousarion crossed our boundary?
He battered with a big Megaric stone;
Chionides felled oak and rough-hewed thence
This club I wield now, having spent my life
In planing knobs and sticking studs to shine;
Somebody else must try mere polished steel!"

Emboldened by the sober mood's return,
"Meanwhile," said I, "since planed and studded club
Once more has pashed competitors to dust,
And poet proves triumphant with that play
Euthukles found last year unfortunate,—
Does triumph spring from smoothness still more smoothed,
Fresh studs sown thick and threefold? In plain words,
Have you exchanged brute-blows,—which teach the brute
Man may surpass him in brutality,—
For human fighting, or true god-like force
Which breathes persuasion nor needs fight at all?

Have you essayed attacking ignorance,
Convicting folly, by their opposites,
Knowledge and wisdom? not by yours for ours,
Fresh ignorance and folly, new for old,
Greater for less, your crime for our mistake!
If so success at last have crowned desert,
Bringing surprise (dashed haply by concern
At your discovery such wild waste of strength
—And what strength!—went so long to keep in vogue
Such warfare—and what warfare!—shamed so fast,
So soon made obsolete, as fell their foe
By the first arrow native to the orb,
First onslaught worthy Aristophanes)—
Was this conviction's entry that same strange
'Something that happened' to confound your feast?"

"Ah, did he witness then my play that failed,
First 'Thesmophoriazousai'? Well and good!
But did he also see,—your Euthukles,—
My 'Grasshoppers' which followed and failed too,
Three months since, at the 'Little-in-the-Fields'?"

"To say that he did see that First—should say
He never cared to see its following."

"There happens to be reason why I wrote

First play and second also. Ask the cause!
I warrant you receive ere talk be done,
Fit answer, authorizing either act.
But here 's the point: as Euthukles made vow
Never again to taste my quality,
So I was minded next experiment
Should tickle palate—yea, of Euthukles!
Not by such utter change, such absolute
A topsyturvy of stage-habitude
As you and he want,—Comedy built fresh,
By novel brick and mortar, base to roof,—
No, for I stand too near and look too close!
Pleasure and pastime yours, spectators brave,
Should I turn art's fixed fabric upside down!
Little you guess how such tough work tasks soul!
Not overtasks, though: give fit strength fair play,
And strength 's a demiourgos! Art renewed?
Ay, in some closet where strength shuts out—first
The friendly faces, sympathetic cheer:
'More of the old provision none supplies
So bounteously as thou,—our love, our pride,
Our author of the many a perfect piece!
Stick to that standard, change were decadence!'
Next, the unfriendly: 'This time, strain will tire,
He 's fresh, Ameipsias thy antagonist!'
—Or better, in some Salaminian cave

Where sky and sea and solitude make earth
And man and noise one insignificance,
Let strength propose itself,—behind the world,—
Sole prize worth winning, work that satisfies
Strength it has dared and done strength's uttermost!
After which,—clap-to closet and quit cave,—
Strength may conclude in Archelaos' court,
And yet esteem the silken company
So much sky-scud, sea-froth, earth-thistledown,
For aught their praise or blame should joy or grieve.
Strength amid crowds as late in solitude
May lead the still life, ply the wordless task:
Then only, when seems need to move or speak,
Moving—for due respect, when statesmen pass,
(Strength, in the closet, watched how spiders spin)
Speaking—when fashion shows intelligence,
(Strength, in the cave, oft whistled to the gulls)
In short, has learnt first, practised afterwards!
Despise the world and reverence yourself,—
Why, you may unmake things and remake things,
And throw behind you, unconcerned enough,
What 's made or marred: 'you teach men, are not taught!'
So marches off the stage Euripides!

"No such thin fare feeds flesh and blood like mine

No such faint fume of fancy sates my soul,
No such seclusion, closet, cave or court,
Suits either: give me Iostephanos
Worth making happy what coarse way she will—
O happy-maker, when her cries increase
About the favourite! 'Aristophanes!
More grist to mill, here 's Kleophon to grind!
He 's for refusing peace, though Sparté cede
Even Dekeleia! Here 's Kleonumos
Declaring—though he threw away his shield,
He 'll thrash you till you lay your lyre aside!
Orestes bids mind where you walk of nights—
He wants your cloak as you his cudgelling:
Here 's, finally, Melanthios fat with fish,
The gormandizer-spendthrift-dramatist!
So, bustle! Pounce on opportunity!
Let fun a-screaming in Parabasis,
Find food for folk agape at either end,
Mad for amusement! Times grow better too,
And should they worsen, why, who laughs, forgets.
In no case, venture boy-experiments!
Old wine 's the wine: new poetry drinks raw:
Two plays a season is your pledge, beside;
So, give us 'Wasps' again, grown hornets now!'"

Then he changed.

"Do you so detect in me—
Brow-bald, chin-bearded, me, curved cheek, carved lip,
Or where soul sits and reigns in either eye—
What suits the—stigma, I say,—style say you,
Of 'Wine-lees-poet'? Bravest of buffoons,
Less blunt than Telekleides, less obscene
Than Murtilos, Hermippos: quite a match
In elegance for Eupolis himself,
Yet pungent as Kratinos at his best?
Graced with traditional immunity
Ever since, much about my grandsire's time,
Some funny village-man in Megara,
Lout-lord and clown-king, used a privilege,
As due religious drinking-bouts came round,
To daub his phyz,—no, that was afterward,—
He merely mounted cart with mates of choice
And traversed country, taking house by house,
At night,—because of danger in the freak,—
Then hollaed 'Skin-flint starves his labourers!
Clench-fist stows figs away, cheats government!
Such an one likes to kiss his neighbour's wife,
And beat his own; while such another . . . Boh!'
Soon came the broad day, circumstantial tale,
Dancing and verse, and there 's our Comedy,
There 's Mullos, there 's Euetes, there 's the stock
I shall be proud to graft my powers upon!

Protected? Punished quite as certainly
When Archons pleased to lay down each his law,—
Your Morucheides-Surakosios sort,—
Each season, 'No more naming citizens,
Only abuse the vice, the vicious spare!
Observe, henceforth no Areopagite
Demean his rank by writing Comedy!'
(They one and all could write the 'Clouds' of course.)
'Needs must we nick expenditure, allow
Comedy half a choros, supper—none,
Times being hard, while applicants increase
For, what costs cash, the Tragic Trilogy.'
Lofty Tragedians! How they lounge aloof
Each with his Triad, three plays to my one,
Not counting the contemptuous fourth, the frank
Concession to mere mortal levity,
Satyric pittance tossed our beggar-world!
Your proud Euripides from first to last
Doled out some five such, never deigned us more!
And these—what curds and whey for marrowy wine!
That same Alkestis you so rave about
Passed muster with him for a Satyr-play,
The prig!—why trifle time with toys and skits
When he could stuff four ragbags sausage-wise
With sophistry, with bookish odds and ends,
Sokrates, meteors, moonshine, 'Life 's not Life,'

'The tongue swore, but unsworn the mind remains,'
And fifty such concoctions, crab-tree-fruit
Digested while, head low and heels in heaven,
He lay, let Comics laugh—for privilege!
Looked puzzled on, or pityingly off,
But never dreamed of paying gibe by jeer,
Buffet by blow: plenty of proverb-pokes
At vice and folly, wicked kings, mad mobs!
No sign of wincing at my Comic lash,
No protest against infamous abuse,
Malignant censure,—nought to prove I scourged
With tougher thong than leek-and-onion-plait!
If ever he glanced gloom, aggrieved at all,
The aggriever must be—Aischulos perhaps:
Or Sophokles he 'd take exception to.
—Do you detect in me—in me, I ask,
The man like to accept this measurement
Of faculty, contentedly sit classed
Mere Comic Poet—since I wrote 'The Birds'?"

I thought there might lurk truth in jest's disguise.

"Thanks!" he resumed, so quick to construe smile!
"I answered—in my mind—these gapers thus:
Since old wine 's ripe and new verse raw, you judge—
What if I vary vintage-mode and mix

Blossom with must, give nosegay to the brew,
Fining, refining, gently, surely, till
The educated taste turns unawares
From customary dregs to draught divine?
Then answered—with my lips: More 'Wasps' you want?
Come next year and I give you 'Grasshoppers'!
And 'Grasshoppers' I gave them,—last month's play.
They formed the Choros. Alkibiades,
No longer Triphales but Trilophos,
(Whom I called Darling-of-the-Summertime,
Born to be nothing else but beautiful
And brave, to eat, drink, love his life away)
Persuades the Tettix (our Autochthon-brood,
That sip the dew and sing on olive-branch
Above the ant-and-emmet populace)
To summon all who meadow, hill and dale
Inhabit—bee, wasp, woodlouse, dragonfly—
To band themselves against red nipper-nose
Stagbeetle, huge Taügetan (you guess—
Sparté) Athenai needs must battle with,
Because her sons are grown effeminate
To that degree—so morbifies their flesh
The poison-drama of Euripides,
Morals and music—there 's no antidote
Occurs save warfare which inspirits blood,
And brings us back perchance the blessed time

When (Choros takes up tale) our commonalty
Firm in primæval virtue, antique faith,
Ere earwig-sophist plagued or pismire-sage,
Cockered no noddle up with A, b, g,
Book-learning, logic-chopping, and the moon,
But just employed their brains on '*Ruppapai*,
Row, boys, munch barley-bread, and take your ease—
Mindful, however, of the tier beneath!'
Ah, golden epoch! while the nobler sort
(Such needs must study, no contesting that!)
Wore no long curls but used to crop their hair,
Gathered the tunic well about the ham,
Remembering 't was soft sand they used for seat
At school-time, while—mark this—the lesson long,
No learner ever dared to cross his legs!
Then, if you bade him take the myrtle-bough
And sing for supper—'t was some grave romaunt
How man of Mitulené, wondrous wise,
Jumped into hedge, by mortals quickset called,
And there, anticipating Oidipous,
Scratched out his eyes and scratched them in again.
None of your Phaidras, Augés, Kanakés,
To mincing music, turn, trill, tweedle-trash,
Whence comes that Marathon is obsolete!
Next, my Antistrophé was—praise of Peace:
Ah, could our people know what Peace implies!

Home to the farm and furrow! Grub one's vine,
Romp with one's Thratta, pretty serving-girl,
When wifie 's busy bathing! Eat and drink,
And drink and eat, what else is good in life?
Slice hare, toss pancake, gaily gurgle down
The Thasian grape in celebration due
Of Bacchos! Welcome, dear domestic rite,
When wife and sons and daughters, Thratta too,
Pour peasoup as we chant delectably
In Bacchos reels, his tunic at his heels!
Enough, you comprehend,—I do at least!
Then,—be but patient,—the Parabasis!
Pray! For in that I also pushed reform.
None of the self-laudation, vulgar brag,
Vainglorious rivals cultivate so much!
No! If some merest word in Art's defence
Justice demanded of me,—never fear!
Claim was preferred, but dignifiedly.
A cricket asked a locust (winged, you know)
What he had seen most rare in foreign parts?
'I have flown far,' chirped he, 'North, East, South,
West,
And nowhere heard of poet worth a fig
If matched with Bald-head here, Aigina's boast,
Who in this play bids rivalry despair
Past, present, and to come, so marvellous

His Tragic, Comic, Lyric excellence!
Whereof the fit reward were (not to speak
Of dinner every day at public cost
I' the Prutaneion) supper with yourselves,
My Public, best dish offered bravest bard!'
No more! no sort of sin against good taste!
Then, satire,—Oh, a plain necessity!
But I won't tell you: for—could I dispense
With one more gird at old Ariphrades?
How scorpion-like he feeds on human flesh—
Ever finds out some novel infamy
Unutterable, inconceivable,
Which all the greater need was to describe
Minutely, each tail-twist at ink-shed time . . .
Now, what 's your gesture caused by? What you loathe,
Don't I loathe doubly, else why take such pains
To tell it you? But keep your prejudice!
My audience justified you! Housebreakers!
This pattern-purity was played and failed
Last Rural Dionusia—failed! for why?
Ameipsias followed with the genuine stuff.
He had been mindful to engage the Four—
Karkinos and his dwarf-crab-family—
Father and sons, they whirled like spinning-tops,
Choros gigantically poked his fun,
The boys' frank laugh relaxed the seniors' brow,

The skies re-echoed victory's acclaim,
Ameipsias gained his due, I got my dose
Of wisdom for the future. Purity?
No more of that next month, Athenai mine!
Contrive new cut of robe who will,—I patch
The old exomis, add no purple sleeve!
The Thesmophoriazousai, smartened up
With certain plaits, shall please, I promise you!

"Yes, I took up the play that failed last year,
And re-arranged things; threw adroitly in,—
No Parachoregema,—men to match
My women there already; and when these
(I had a hit at Aristullos here,
His plan how womankind should rule the roast)
Drove men to plough—'A-field, ye cribbed of cape!'
Men showed themselves exempt from service straight
Stupendously, till all the boys cried 'Brave!'
Then for the elders, I bethought me too,
Improved upon Mnesilochos' release
From the old bowman, board and binding-strap:
I made his son-in-law Euripides
Engage to put both shrewish wives away—
'Gravity' one, the other 'Sophist-lore'—
And mate with the Bald Bard's hetairai twain—
'Goodhumour' and 'Indulgence': on they tripped.

Murrhiné, Akalanthis,—'beautiful
Their whole belongings'—crowd joined choros there!
And while the Toxotes wound up his part
By shower of nuts and sweetmeats on the mob,
The woman-choros celebrated New
Kalligeneia, the frank last-day rite.
Brief, I was chairéd and caressed and crowned
And the whole theatre broke out a-roar,
Echoed my admonition—choros-cap—
Rivals of mine, your hands to your faces!
Summon no more the Muses, the Graces,
Since here by my side they have chosen their places!
And so we all flocked merrily to feast,
I, my choragos, choros, actors, mutes
And flutes aforesaid, friends in crowd, no fear,
At the Priest's supper; and hilarity
Grew none the less that, early in the piece,
Ran a report, from row to row close-packed,
Of messenger's arrival at the Port
With weighty tidings, 'Of Lusandros' flight,'
Opined one; 'That Euboia penitent
Sends the Confederation fifty ships,'
Preferred another; while 'The Great King's Eye
Has brought a present for Elaphion here,
That rarest peacock Kompolakuthes!'
Such was the supposition of a third.

'No matter what the news,' friend Strattis laughed,
'It won't be worse for waiting: while each click
Of the klepsudra sets a shaking grave
Resentment in our shark's-head, boiled and spoiled
By this time: dished in Sphettian vinegar,
Silphion and honey, served with cocks'-brain-sauce!
So, swift to supper, Poet! No mistake,
This play; nor, like the unflavoured "Grasshoppers,"
Salt without thyme! Right merrily we supped,
Till—something happened.

"Out it shall, at last!

"Mirth drew to ending, for the cup was crowned
To the Triumphant! 'Kleonclapper erst,
Now, Plier of a scourge Euripides
Fairly turns tail from, flying Attiké
For Makedonia's rocks and frosts and bears,
Where, furry grown, he growls to match the squeak
Of girl-voiced, crocus-vested Agathon!
Ha ha, he he!' When suddenly a knock—
Sharp, solitary, cold, authoritative.

"'*Babaiax!* Sokrates a-passing by,
A-peering in for Aristullos' sake,
To put a question touching Comic Law?'

"No! Enters an old pale-swathed majesty,
Makes slow mute passage through two ranks as mute,
(Strattis stood up with all the rest, the sneak!)
Grey brow still bent on ground, upraised at length
When, our Priest reached, full-front the vision paused.

"'Priest!'—the deep tone succeeded the fixed gaze—
Thou carest that thy god have spectacle
Decent and seemly; wherefore I announce
That, since Euripides is dead to-day,
My Choros, at the Greater Feast, next month,
Shall, clothed in black, appear ungarlanded!'

"Then the grey brow sank low, and Sophokles
Re-swathed him, sweeping doorward: mutely passed
'Twixt rows as mute, to mingle possibly
With certain gods who convoy age to port;
And night resumed him.

"When our stupor broke,
Chirpings took courage, and grew audible.

'Dead—so one speaks now of Euripides!
Ungarlanded dance Choros, did he say?
I guess the reason: in extreme old age
No doubt such have the gods for visitants.
Why did he dedicate to Herakles

An altar else, but that the god, turned Judge,
Told him in dream who took the crown of gold?
He who restored Akropolis the theft,
Himself may feel perhaps a timely twinge
At thought of certain other crowns he filched
From—who now visits Herakles the Judge.
Instance "Medeia"! that play yielded palm
To Sophokles; and he again—to whom?
Euphorion! Why? Ask Herakles the Judge!'

'Ungarlanded, just means—economy!
Suppress robes, chaplets, everything suppress
Except the poet's present! An old tale
Put capitally by Trugaios—eh?
—News from the world of transformation strange!
How Sophokles is grown Simonides,
And,—aged, rotten,—all the same, for greed
Would venture on a hurdle out to sea!—
So jokes Philonides. Kallistratos
Retorts—Mistake! Instead of stinginess,
The fact is, in extreme decrepitude,
He has discarded poet and turned priest,
Priest of Half-Hero Alkon: visited
In his own house too by Asklepios' self,
So he avers. Meanwhile, his own estate
Lies fallow; Iophon 's the manager,—

Nay, touches up a play, brings out the same,
Asserts true sonship. See to what you sink
After your dozen-dozen prodigies!
Looking so old—Euripides seems young,
Born ten years later.'

'Just his tricky style!
Since, stealing first away, he wins first word
Out of good-natured rival Sophokles,
Procures himself no bad panegyric.
Had fate willed otherwise, himself were taxed
To pay survivor's-tribute,—harder squeezed
From anybody beaten first to last,
Than one who, steadily a conqueror,
Finds that his magnanimity is tasked
To merely make pretence and—beat itself!'

"So chirped the feasters though suppressedly.

"But I—what else do you suppose?—had pierced
Quite through friends' outside-straining, foes' mock
praise,
And reached conviction hearted under all.
Death's rapid line had closed a life's account,
And cut off, left unalterably clear
The summed-up value of Euripides.

Well, it might be the Thasian! Certainly
There sang suggestive music in my ears;
And, through—what sophists style—the wall of sense
My eyes pierced: death seemed life and life seemed death,
Envisaged that way, now, which I, before,
Conceived was just a moonstruck mood. Quite plain
There re-insisted,—ay, each prim stiff phrase
Of each old play, my still-new laughing-stock,
Had meaning, well worth poet's pains to state,
Should life prove half true life's term,—death, the rest.
As for the other question, late so large
Now all at once so little,—he or I,
Which better comprehended playwright craft,—
There, too, old admonition took fresh point.
As clear recurred our last word-interchange
Two years since, when I tried with 'Ploutos.' 'Vain!'
Saluted me the cold grave-bearded bard—
'Vain, this late trial, Aristophanes!
None baulks the genius with impunity!
You know what kind 's the nobler, what makes grave
Or what makes grin; there 's yet a nobler still,
Possibly,—what makes wise, not grave,—and glad,
Not grinning: whereby laughter joins with tears,
Tragic and Comic Poet prove one power,
And Aristophanes becomes our Fourth—

Nay, greatest! Never needs the Art stand still,
But those Art leans on lag, and none like you,
Her strongest of supports, whose step aside
Undoes the march: defection checks advance
Too late adventured! See the "Ploutos" here!
This step decides your foot from old to new—
Proves you relinquish song and dance and jest,
Discard the beast, and, rising from all-fours,
Fain would paint, manlike, actual human life,
Make veritable men think, say and do.
Here 's the conception: which to execute,
Where 's force? Spent! Ere the race began, was breath
O' the runner squandered on each friendly fool—
Wit-fireworks fizzed off while day craved no flame:
How should the night receive her due of fire
Flared out in Wasps and Horses, Clouds and Birds,
Prodigiously a-crackle? Rest content!
The new adventure for the novel man
Born to that next success myself foresee
In right of where I reach before I rest.
At end of a long course, straight all the way,
Well may there tremble somewhat into ken
The untrod path, clouds veiled from earlier gaze!
None may live two lives: I have lived mine through,
Die where I first stand still. You retrograde.
I leave my life's work. *I* compete with you,

My last with your last, my Antiope—
Phoinissai—with this Ploutos? No, I think!
Ever shall great and awful Victory
Accompany my life—in Maketis
If not Athenai. Take my farewell, friend!
Friend,—for from no consummate excellence
Like yours, whatever fault may countervail,
Do I profess estrangement: murk the marsh,
Yet where a solitary marble block
Blanches the gloom, there let the eagle perch!
You show—what splinters of Pentelikos,
Islanded by what ordure! Eagles fly,
Rest on the right place, thence depart as free;
But 'ware man's footstep, would it traverse mire
Untainted! Mire is safe for worms that crawl.'

"Balaustion! Here are very many words,
All to portray one moment's rush of thought,—
And much they do it! Still, you understand.
The Archon, the Feast-master, read their sum
And substance, judged the banquet-glow extinct,
So rose, discreetly if abruptly, crowned
The parting cup,—'To the Good Genius, then!'

"Up starts young Strattis for a final flash:
'Ay the Good Genius! To the Comic Muse,

She who evolves superiority,
Triumph and joy from sorrow, unsuccess
And all that 's incomplete in human life;
Who proves such actual failure transient wrong,
Since out of body uncouth, halt and maimed—
Since out of soul grotesque, corrupt or blank—
Fancy, uplifted by the Muse, can flit
To soul and body, re-instate them Man:
Beside which perfect man, how clear we see
Divergency from type was earth's effect!
Escaping whence by laughter,—Fancy's feat,—
We right man's wrong, establish true for false,—
Above misshapen body, uncouth soul,
Reach the fine form, the clear intelligence—
Above unseemliness, reach decent law,—
By laughter: attestation of the Muse
That low-and-ugsome is not signed and sealed
Incontrovertibly man's portion here,
Or, if here,—why, still high-and-fair exists
In that ethereal realm where laughs our soul
Lift by the Muse. Hail thou her ministrant!
Hail who accepted no deformity
In man as normal and remediless,
But rather pushed it to such gross extreme
That, outraged, we protest by eye's recoil
The opposite proves somewhere rule and law!

Hail who implied, by limning Lamachos,
Plenty and pastime wait on peace, not war!
Philokleon—better bear a wrong than plead,
Play the litigious fool to stuff the mouth
Of dikast with the due three-obol fee!
The Paphlagonian—stick to the old sway
Of few and wise, not rabble-government!
Trugaios, Pisthetairos, Strepsiades,—
Why multiply examples? Hail, in fine,
The hero of each painted monster—so
Suggesting the unpictured perfect shape!
Pour out! A laugh to Aristophanes!'

"Stay, my fine Strattis"—and I stopped applause—
'To the Good Genius—but the Tragic Muse!
She who instructs her poet, bids man's soul
Play man's part merely nor attempt the gods'
Ill-guessed of! Task humanity to height,
Put passion to prime use, urge will, unshamed
When will's last effort breaks in impotence!
No power forego, elude: no weakness,—plied
Fairly by power and will,—renounce, deny!
Acknowledge, in such miscalled weakness strength
Latent: and substitute thus things for words!
Make man run life's race fairly,—legs and feet,
Craving no false wings to o'erfly its length!

Trust on, trust ever, trust to end—in truth!
By truth of extreme passion, utmost will,
Shame back all false display of either force—
Barrier about such strenuous heat and glow,
That cowardice shall shirk contending,—cant,
Pretension, shrivel at truth's first approach!
Pour to the Tragic Muse's ministrant
Who, as he pictured pure Hippolutos,
Abolished our earth's blot Ariphrades;
Who, as he drew Bellerophon the bold,
Proclaimed Kleonumos incredible;
Who, as his Theseus towered up man once more,
Made Alkibiades shrink boy again!
A tear—no woman's tribute, weak exchange
For action, water spent and heart's-blood saved—
No man's regret for greatness gone, ungraced
Perchance by even that poor meed, man's praise—
But some god's superabundance of desire,
Yearning of will to 'scape necessity,—
Love's overbrimming for self-sacrifice,
Whence good might be, which never else may be,
By power displayed, forbidden this strait sphere,—
Effort expressible one only way—
Such tear from me fall to Euripides!"

The Thasian!—All, the Thasian, I account!

Whereupon outburst the whole company
Into applause and—laughter, would you think?

"The unrivalled one! How, never at a loss,
He turns the Tragic on its Comic side
Else imperceptible! Here 's death itself—
Death of a rival, of an enemy,—
Scarce seen as Comic till the master-touch
Made it acknowledge Aristophanes!
Lo, that Euripidean laurel-tree
Struck to the heart by lightning! Sokrates
Would question us, with buzz of how and why,
Wherefore the berry's virtue, the bloom's vice,
Till we all wished him quiet with his friend;
Agathon would compose an elegy,
Lyric bewailment fit to move a stone,
And, stones responsive, we might wince, 't is like:
Nay, with most cause of all to weep the least,
Sophokles ordains mourning for his sake
While we confess to a remorseful twinge:—
Suddenly, who but Aristophanes,
Prompt to the rescue, puts forth solemn hand,
Singles us out the tragic tree's best branch,
Persuades it groundward and, at tip, appends,
For votive-visor, Faun's goat-grinning face!
Back it flies, evermore with jest a-top,

And we recover the true mood, and laugh!"

"I felt as when some Nikias,—ninny-like
Troubled by sunspot-portent, moon-eclipse,—
At fault a little, sees no choice but sound
Retreat from foeman; and his troops mistake
The signal, and hail onset in the blast,
And at their joyous answer, *alalé*,
Back the old courage brings the scattered wits;
He wonders what his doubt meant, quick confirms
The happy error, blows the charge amain.
So I repaired things.

"Both be praised" thanked I.
"You who have laughed with Aristophanes,
You who wept rather with the Lord of Tears·
Priest, do thou, president alike o'er each,
Tragic and Comic function of the god,
Help with libation to the blended twain!
Either of which who serving, only serves—
Proclaims himself disqualified to pour
To that Good Genius—complex Poetry,
Uniting each god-grace, including both:
Which, operant for body as for soul,
Masters alike the laughter and the tears,
Supreme in lowliest earth, sublimest sky.

Who dares disjoin these,—whether he ignores
Body or soul, whichever half destroys,—
Maims the else perfect manhood, perpetrates
Again the inexpiable crime we curse—
Hacks at the Hermai, halves each guardian shape
Combining, nowise vainly, prominence
Of august head and enthroned intellect,
With homelier symbol of asserted sense,—
Nature's prime impulse, earthly appetite.
For, when our folly ventures on the freak,
Would fain abolish joy and fruitfulness,
Mutilate nature—what avails the Head
Left solitarily predominant,—
Unbodied soul,—not Hermes, both in one?
I, no more than our City, acquiesce
In such a desecration, but defend
Man's double nature—ay, wert thou its foe!
Could I once more, thou cold Euripides,
Encounter thee, in nought would I abate
My warfare, nor subdue my worst attack
On thee whose life-work preached 'Raise soul, sink sense!
Evirate Hermes!'—would avenge the god,
And justify myself. Once face to face,
Thou, the argute and tricksy, shouldst not wrap,
As thine old fashion was, in silent scorn

The breast that quickened at the sting of truth,
Nor turn from me, as, if the tale be true,
From Lais when she met thee in thy walks,
And questioned why she had no rights as thou:
Not so shouldst thou betake thee, be assured,
To book and pencil, deign me no reply!
I would extract an answer from those lips
So closed and cold, were mine the garden-chance!
Gone from the world! Does none remain to take
Thy part and ply me with thy sophist-skill?
No sun makes proof of his whole potency
For gold and purple in that orb we view:
The apparent orb does little but leave blind
The audacious, and confused the worshipping;
But, close on orb's departure, must succeed
The serviceable cloud,—must intervene,
Induce expenditure of rose and blue,
Reveal what lay in him was lost to us.
So, friends, what hinders, as we homeward go,
If, privileged by triumph gained to-day,
We clasp that cloud our sun left saturate,
The Rhodian rosy with Euripides?
Not of my audience on my triumph-day,
She nor her husband! After the night's news
Neither will sleep but watch; I know the mood.
Accompany! my crown declares my right!

And here you stand with those warm golden eyes!

"In honest language, I am scarce too sure
Whether I really felt, indeed expressed
Then, in that presence, things I now repeat:
Nor half, nor any one word,—will that do?
May be, such eyes must strike conviction, turn
One's nature bottom upwards, show the base—
The live rock latent under wave and foam:
Superimposure these! Yet solid stuff
Will ever and anon, obeying star,
(And what star reaches rock-nerve like an eye?)
Swim up to surface, spout or mud or flame,
And find no more to do than sink as fast.

"Anyhow, I have followed happily
The impulse, pledged my Genius with effect,
Since. come to see you, I am shown—myself!"

I answered:

"One of us declared for both
'Welcome the glory of Aristophanes.'
The other adds: and,—if that glory last,
Nor marsh-born vapour creep to veil the same,—
Once entered, share in our solemnity!

Commemorate, as we, Euripides!"

"What?" he looked round, "I darken the bright house?
Profane the temple of your deity?
That 's true! Else wherefore does he stand portrayed?
What Rhodian paint and pencil saved so much,
Beard, freckled face, brow—all but breath, I hope!
Come, that 's unfair: myself am somebody,
Yet my pictorial fame 's just potter's-work,—
I merely figure on men's drinking-mugs!
I and the Flat-nose, Sophroniskos' son,
Oft make a pair. But what 's this lies below?
His table-book and graver, playwright's tool!
And lo, the sweet psalterion, strung and screwed,
Whereon he tried those *le-é-é-é-és*
And *ke-é-é-é-és* and turns and trills,
Lovely lark's tirra-lirra, lad's delight!
Aischulos' bronze-throat eagle-bark at blood
Has somehow spoiled my taste for twitterings!
With . . . what, and did he leave you 'Herakles'?
The 'Frenzied Hero,' one unfractured sheet,
No pine-wood tablets smeared with treacherous wax—
Papuros perfect as e'er tempted pen!
This sacred twist of bay-leaves dead and sere
Must be that crown the fine work failed to catch,—
No wonder! This might crown 'Antiope.'

'Herakles' triumph? In your heart perhaps!
But elsewhere? Come now, I 'll explain the case,
Show you the main mistake. Give me the sheet!"

I interrupted·

"Aristophanes!
The stranger-woman sues in her abode—
'Be honoured as our guest!' But, call it—shrine,
Then 'No dishonour to the Daimon!' bids
The priestess 'or expect dishonour's due!'
You enter fresh from your worst infamy,
Last instance of long outrage; yet I pause,
Withhold the word a-tremble on my lip,
Incline me, rather, yearn to reverence,—
So you but suffer that I see the blaze
And not the bolt,—the splendid fancy-fling,
Not the cold iron malice, the launched lie
Whence heavenly fire has withered; impotent,
Yet execrable, leave it 'neath the look
Of yon impassive presence! What he scorned,
His life long, need I touch, offend my foot,
To prove that malice missed its mark, that lie
Cumbers the ground, returns to whence it came?
I marvel, I deplore,—the rest be mute!
But, throw off hate's celestiality,—

Show me, apart from song-flash and wit-flame,
A mere man's hand ignobly clenched against
Yon supreme calmness,—and I interpose,
Such as you see me! Silk breaks lightning's blow!"

He seemed to scarce so much as notice me,
Aught had I spoken, save the final phrase:
Arrested there.

"Euripides grown calm!
Calmness supreme means dead and therefore safe,"
He muttered; then more audibly began—

"Dead! Such must die! Could people comprehend!
There 's the unfairness of it! So obtuse
Are all: from Solon downward with his saw
'Let none revile the dead,—no, though the son,
Nay, far descendant, should revile thyself!'—
To him who made Elektra, in the act
Of wreaking vengeance on her worst of foes,
Scruple to blame, since speech that blames insults
Too much the very villain life-released.
Now, *I* say, only after death, begins
That formidable claim,—immunity
Of faultiness from fault's due punishment!
The living, who defame me,—why, they live:

Fools,—I best prove them foolish by their life,
Will they but work on, lay their work by mine,
And wait a little, one Olympiad, say!
Then—where 's the vital force, mine froze beside?
The sturdy fibre, shamed my brittle stuff?
The school-correctness, sure of wise award
When my vagaries cease to tickle taste?
Where 's censure that must sink me, judgment big
Awaiting just the word posterity
Pants to pronounce? Time's wave breaks, buries—*whom*,
Fools, when myself confronts you four years hence?
But die, ere next Lenaia,—safely so
You 'scape me, slink with all your ignorance,
Stupidity and malice, to that hole
O'er which survivors croak 'Respect the dead!'
Ay, for I needs must! But allow me clutch
Only a carrion-handful, lend it sense,
(Mine, not its own, or could it answer me?)
And question 'You, I pluck from hiding-place,
Whose cant was, certain years ago, my 'Clouds'
Might last until the swallows came with Spring—
Whose chatter, 'Birds' are unintelligible,
Mere psychologic puzzling: poetry?
List, the true lay to rock a cradle with!
O man of Mitulené, wondrous wise!'
—Would not I rub each face in its own filth

To tune of 'Now that years have come and gone,
How does the fact stand? What 's demonstrable
By time, that tries things?—your own test, not mine
Who think men are, were, ever will be fools,
Though somehow fools confute fools,—as these, you!
Don't mumble to the sheepish twos and threes
You cornered and called 'audience'! Face this *me*
Who know, and can, and—helped by fifty years—
Do pulverize you pygmies, then as now!'

"Ay, now as then, I pulverize the brood,
Balaustion! Mindful, from the first, where foe
Would hide head safe when hand had flung its stone,
I did not turn cheek and take pleasantry,
But flogged while skin could purple and flesh start,
To teach fools whom they tried conclusions with.
First face a-splutter at me got such splotch
Of prompt slab mud as, filling mouth to maw,
Made its concern thenceforward not so much
To criticize me as go cleanse itself.
The only drawback to which huge delight,—
(He saw it, how he saw it, that calm cold
Sagacity you call Euripides!)
—Why, 't is that, make a muckheap of a man,
There, pillared by your prowess, he remains,
Immortally immerded. Not so he!

Men pelted him but got no pellet back.
He reasoned, I 'll engage,—'Acquaint the world
Certain minuteness butted at my knee?
Dogface Eruxis, the small satirist,—
What better would the manikin desire
Than to strut forth on tiptoe, notable
As who, so far up, fouled me in the flank?'
So dealt he with the dwarfs: we giants, too,
Why must we emulate their pin-point play?
Render imperishable—impotence,
For mud throw mountains? Zeus, by mud unreached,—
Well, 't was no dwarf he heaved Olumpos at!"

My heart burned up within me to my tongue.

"And why must men remember, ages hence,
Who it was rolled down rocks, but refuse too—
Strattis might steal from! mixture-monument,
Recording what? 'I, Aristophanes,
Who boast me much inventive in my art,
Against Euripides thus volleyed muck
Because, in art, he too extended bounds.
I—patriot, loving peace and hating war,—
Choosing the rule of few, but wise and good,
Rather than mob-dictature, fools and knaves
However multiplied their mastery,—

Despising most of all the demagogue,
(Noisome air-bubble, buoyed up, borne along
By kindred breath of knave and fool below,
Whose hearts swell proudly as each puffing face
Grows big, reflected in that glassy ball,
Vacuity, just bellied out to break
And righteously bespatter friends the first)—
I loathing,—beyond less puissant speech
Than my own god-grand language to declare,—
The fawning, cozenage and calumny
Wherewith such favourite feeds the populace
That fan and set him flying for reward :—
I who, detecting what vice underlies
Thought's superstructure,—fancy's sludge and slime
'Twixt fact's sound floor and thought's mere surface-growth
Of hopes and fears which root no deeplier down
Than where all such mere fungi breed and bloat—
Namely, man's misconception of the God :—
I, loving, hating, wishful from my soul
That truth should triumph, falsehood have defeat,
—Why, all my soul's supremacy of power
Did I pour out in volley just on him
Who, his whole life long, championed every cause
I called my heart's cause, loving as I loved,
Hating my hates, spurned falsehood, championed truth,—
Championed truth not by flagellating foe

With simple rose and lily, gibe and jeer,
Sly wink of boon-companion o'er his bowze
Who, while he blames the liquor, smacks the lip,
Blames, doubtless, but leers condonation too,—
No, the balled fist broke brow like thunderbolt,
Battered till brain flew! Seeing which descent,
None questioned that was first acquaintanceship,
The avenger's with the vice he crashed through bone.
Still, he displeased me; and I turned from foe
To fellow-fighter, flung much stone, more mud,—
But missed him, since he lives aloof, I see.'
Pah! stop more shame, deep-cutting glory through,
Nor add, this poet, learned,—found no taunt
Tell like 'That other poet studies books!'
Wise,—cried 'At each attempt to move our hearts,
He uses the mere phrase of daily life!'
Witty,—'His mother was a herb-woman!'
Veracious, honest, loyal, fair and good,—
'It was Kephisophon who helped him write!'

"Whence,—O the tragic end of comedy!—
Balaustion pities Aristophanes.
For, who believed him? Those who laughed so loud?
They heard him call the sun Sicilian cheese!
Had he called true cheese—curd, would muscle move?
What made them laugh but the enormous lie?

'Kephisophon wrote Herakles? ha, ha,
What can have stirred the wine-dregs, soured the soul
And set a-lying Aristophanes?
Some accident at which he took offence!
The Tragic Master in a moody muse
Passed him unhailing, and it hurts—it hurts!
Beside, there 's licence for the Wine-lees-song!'"

Blood burnt the cheek-bone, each black eye flashed fierce.

"But this exceeds our licence! Stay awhile—
That 's the solution! both are foreigners,
The fresh-come Rhodian lady and her spouse
The man of Phokis: newly resident,
Nowise instructed—that explains it all!
No born and bred Athenian but would smile,
Unless frown seemed more fit for ignorance.
These strangers have a privilege!

"You blame"
(Presently he resumed with milder mien)
"Both theory and practice—Comedy:
Blame her from altitudes the Tragic friend
Rose to, and upraised friends along with him,
No matter how. Once there, all 's cold and fine,
Passionless, rational; our world beneath

Shows (should you condescend to grace so much
As glance at poor Athenai) grimly gross—
A population which, mere flesh and blood,
Eats, drinks and kisses, falls to fisticuffs,
Then hugs as hugely: speaks too as it acts,
Prodigiously talks nonsense,—townsmen needs
Must parley in their town's vernacular.
Such world has, of two courses, one to choose:
Unworld itself,—or else go blackening off
To its crow-kindred, leave philosophy
Her heights serene, fit perch for owls like you.
Now, since the world demurs to either course,
Permit me,—in default of boy or girl,
So they be reared Athenian, good and true,—
To praise what you most blame! Hear Art's defence!
I 'll prove our institution, Comedy,
Coëval with the birth of freedom, matched
So nice with our Republic, that its growth
Measures each greatness, just as its decline
Would signalize the downfall of the pair.
Our Art began when Bacchos . . . never mind!
You and your master don't acknowledge gods:
'They are not, no, they are not!' well,—began
When the rude instinct of our race outspoke,
Found,—on recurrence of festivity
Occasioned by black mother-earth's good will

To children, as they took her vintage-gifts,—
Found—not the least of many benefits—
That wine unlocked the stiffest lip, and loosed
The tongue late dry and reticent of joke,
Through custom's gripe which gladness thrusts aside.
So, emulating liberalities,
Heaven joined with earth for that god's day at least,
Renewed man's privilege, grown obsolete,
Of telling truth nor dreading punishment.
Whereon the joyous band disguised their forms
With skins, beast-fashion, daubed each phyz with dregs,
Then hollaed 'Neighbour, you are fool, you—knave,
You—hard to serve, you—stingy to reward!'
The guiltless crowed, the guilty sunk their crest,
And good folk gained thereby, 't was evident.
Whence, by degrees, a birth of happier thought,
The notion came—not simply this to say,
But this to do—prove, put in evidence,
And act the fool, the knave, the harsh, the hunks,
Who *did* prate, cheat, shake fist, draw pursestring tight,
As crowd might see, which only heard before.

"So played the Poet, with his man of parts;
And all the others, found unqualified
To mount cart and be persons, made the mob,
Joined choros, fortified their fellows' fun,

Anticipated the community,
Gave judgment which the public ratified.
Suiting rough weapon doubtless to plain truth,
They flung, for word-artillery, why—filth;
Still, folk who wiped the unsavoury salute
From visage, would prefer the mess to wit—
Steel, poked through midriff with a civil speech,
As now the way is: then, the kindlier mode
Was—drub not stab, ribroast not scarify!
So did Sousarion introduce, and so
Did I, acceding, find the Comic Art:
Club,—if I call it,—notice what 's implied!
An engine proper for rough chastisement,
No downright slaying: with impunity—
Provided crabtree, steeped in oily joke,
Deal only such a bruise as laughter cures.
I kept the gained advantage: stickled still
For club-law—stout fun and allowanced thumps:
Knocked in each knob a crevice to hold joke
As fig-leaf holds the fat-fry.

"Next, whom thrash?
Only the coarse fool and the clownish knave?
Higher, more artificial, composite
Offence should prove my prowess, eye and arm!
Not who robs henroost, tells of untaxed figs,

Spends all his substance on stewed ellops-fish,
Or gives a pheasant to his neighbour's wife:
No! strike malpractice that affects the State,
The common weal—intriguer or poltroon,
Venality, corruption, what care I
If shrewd or witless merely?—so the thing
Lay sap to aught that made Athenai bright
And happy, change her customs, lead astray
Youth or age, play the demagogue at Pnux,
The sophist in Palaistra, or—what 's worst,
As widest mischief,—from the Theatre
Preach innovation, bring contempt on oaths,
Adorn licentiousness, despise the Cult.
Are such to be my game? Why, then there wants
Quite other cunning than a cudgel-sweep!
Grasp the old stout stock, but new tip with steel
Each boss, if I would bray—no callous hide
Simply, but Lamachos in coat of proof,
Or Kleon cased about with impudence!
Shaft pushed no worse while point pierced sparkling so
That none smiled 'Sportive, what seems savagest,
—Innocuous anger, spiteless rustic mirth!'
Yet spiteless in a sort, considered well,
Since I pursued my warfare till each wound
Went through the mere man, reached the principle
Worth purging from Athenai. Lamachos?

No, I attacked war's representative;
Kleon? No, flattery of the populace;
Sokrates? No, but that pernicious seed
Of sophists whereby hopeful youth is taught
To jabber argument, chop logic, pore
On sun and moon, and worship Whirligig.
O your tragedian, with the lofty grace,
Aims at no other and effects as much?
Candidly: what 's a polished period worth,
Filed curt sententiousness of loaded line,
When he who deals out doctrine, primly steps
From just that selfsame moon he maunders of,
And, blood-thinned by his pallid nutriment,
Proposes to rich earth-blood—purity?
In me, 't was equal-balanced flesh rebuked
Excess alike in stuff-guts Glauketes
Or starveling Chairephon; I challenged both,—
Strong understander of our common life,
I urged sustainment of humanity.
Whereas when your tragedian cries up Peace—
He 's silent as to cheesecakes Peace may chew;
Seeing through rabble-rule, he shuts his eye
To what were better done than crowding Pnux—
That 's—dance '*Threttanelo*, the Kuklops drunk!

"My power has hardly need to vaunt itself!

Opposers peep and mutter, or speak plain:
'No naming names in Comedy!' votes one,
'Nor vilifying live folk!' legislates
Another, 'urge amendment on the dead!'
'Don't throw away hard cash,' supplies a third,
'But crib from actor's dresses, choros-treats!'
Then Kleon did his best to bully me:
Called me before the Law Court: 'Such a play
Satirized citizens with strangers there,
Such other,'—why, its fault was in myself!
I was, this time, the stranger, privileged
To act no play at all,—Egyptian, I—
Rhodian or Kameirensian, Aiginete,
Lindian, or any foreigner he liked—
Because I can't write Attic, probably!
Go ask my rivals,—how they roughed my fleece,
And how, shorn pink themselves, the huddled sheep
Shiver at distance from the snapping shears!
Why must they needs provoke me?

"All the same,
No matter for my triumph, I foretell
Subsidence of the day-star: quench his beams
No Aias e'er was equal to the feat
By throw of shield, tough-hided seven times seven,
'Twixt sky and earth! 't is dullards soft and sure

Who breathe against his brightest, here a sigh
And there a 'So let be, we pardon you!'
Till the minute mist hangs a block, has tamed
Noonblaze to 'twilight mild and equable,'
Vote the old women spinning out of doors.
Give me the earth-spasm, when the lion ramped
And the bull gendered in the brave gold flare!
O you shall have amusement,—better still,
Instruction! no more horse-play, naming names,
Taxing the fancy when plain sense will serve!
Thearion, now, my friend who bakes you bread,
What 's worthier limning than his household life?
His whims and ways, his quarrels with the spouse,
And how the son, instead of learning knead
Kilikian loaves, brings heart-break on his sire
By buying horseflesh branded *San*, each flank,
From shrewd Menippos who imports the ware:
While pretty daughter Kepphé too much haunts
The shop of Sporgilos the barber! brave!
Out with Thearion's meal-tub politics
In lieu of Pisthetairos, Strepsiades!
That 's your exchange? O Muse of Megara!
Advise the fools '*Feed babe on weasel-lap*
For wild-boar's marrow, Cheiron's hero-pap,
And rear, for man—Ariphrades, mayhap!'
Yes, my Balaustion, yes, my Euthukles,

That 's *your* exchange,—who, foreigners in fact
And fancy, would impose your squeamishness
On sturdy health, and substitute such brat
For the right offspring of us Rocky Ones,
Because babe kicks the cradle,—crows, not mewls!

" Which brings me to the prime fault, poison-speck
Whence all the plague springs—that first feud of all
'Twixt me and you and your Euripides.
'Unworld the world' frowns he, my opposite.
I cry, 'Life!' 'Death,' he groans, 'our better Life!'
Despise what is—the good and graspable,
Prefer the out of sight and in at mind,
To village-joy, the well-side violet-patch,
The jolly club-feast when our field 's in soak,
Roast thrushes, hare-soup, pea-soup, deep washed down
With Peparethian; the prompt paying off
That black-eyed brown-skinned country-flavoured wench
We caught among our brushwood foraging:
On these look fig-juice, curdle up life's cream,
And fall to magnifying misery!
Or, if you condescend to happiness,
Why, talk, talk, talk about the empty name
While thing's self lies neglected 'neath your nose!
I need particular discourtesy
And private insult from Euripides

'To render contest with him credible?
Say, all of me is outraged! one stretched sense,
I represent the whole Republic,—gods,
Heroes, priests, legislators, poets,—prone,
And pummelled into insignificance,
If will in him were matched with power of stroke.
For see what he has changed or hoped to change!
How few years since, when he began the fight,
Did there beat life indeed Athenai through!
Plenty and peace, then! Hellas thundersmote
The Persian. He himself had birth, you say,
That morn salvation broke at Salamis,
And heroes still walked earth. Themistokles—
Surely his mere back-stretch of hand could still
Find, not so lost in dark, Odusseus?—he
Holding as surely on to Herakles,—
Who touched Zeus, link by link, the unruptured chain!
Were poets absent? Aischulos might hail—
With Pindaros, Theognis,—whom for sire?
Homeros' self, departed yesterday!
While Hellas, saved and sung to, then and thus,—
Ah, people,—ah, lost antique liberty!
We lived, ourselves, undoubted lords of earth:
Wherever olives flourish, corn yields crop
To constitute our title—ours such land!
Outside of oil and breadstuff,—barbarism!

What need of conquest? Let barbarians starve!
Devote our whole strength to our sole defence,
Content with peerless native products, home,
Beauty profuse in earth's mere sights and sounds,
Such men, such women, and such gods their guard!
The gods? he worshipped best who feared them most,
And left their nature uninquired into,
—Nature? their very names! pay reverence,
Do sacrifice for our part, theirs would be
To prove benignantest of playfellows.
With kindly humanism they countenanced
Our emulation of divine escapes
Through sense and soul: soul, sense are made to use;
Use each, acknowledging its god the while!
Crush grape, dance, drink, indulge, for Bacchos' sake!
'T is Aphrodité's feast-day—frisk and fling,
Provided we observe our oaths, and house
Duly the stranger: Zeus takes umbrage else!
Ah, the great time—had I been there to taste!
Perikles, right Olumpian,—occupied
As yet with getting an Olumpos reared
Marble and gold above Akropolis,—
Wisely so spends what thrifty fools amassed
For cut-throat projects. Who carves Promachos?
Who writes the Oresteia?

"Ah, the time!
For, all at once, a cloud has blanched the blue,
A cold wind creeps through the close vineyard-rank,
The olive-leaves curl, violets crisp and close
Like a nymph's wrinkling at the bath's first splash
On breast. (Your pardon!) There 's a restless change,
Deterioration. Larks and nightingales
Are silenced, here and there a gor-crow grim
Flaps past, as scenting opportunity.
Where Kimon passaged to the Boulé once,
A starveling crew, unkempt, unshorn, unwashed,
Occupy altar-base and temple-step,
Are minded to indoctrinate our youth!
How call these carrion kill-joys that intrude?
'Wise men,' their nomenclature! Prodikos—
Who scarce could, unassisted, pick his steps
From way Theseia to the Tripods' way,—
This empty noddle comprehends the sun,—
How he 's Aigina's bigness, wheels no whit
His way from east to west, nor wants a steed!
And here 's Protagoras sets wrongheads right,
Explains what virtue, vice, truth, falsehood mean,
Makes all we seemed to know prove ignorance
Yet knowledge also, since, on either side
Of any question, something is to say,
Nothing to 'stablish, all things to disturb!

And shall youth go and play at kottabos,
Leaving unsettled whether moon-spots breed?
Or dare keep Choes ere the problem 's solved—
Why should I like my wife who dislikes me?
'But sure the gods permit this, censure that?'
So tell them! straight the answer 's in your teeth:
'You relegate these points, then, to the gods?
What and where are they?' What my sire supposed,
And where yon cloud conceals them! 'Till they 'scape
And scramble down to Leda, as a swan,
Europa, as a bull! why not as—ass
To somebody? Your sire was Zeus perhaps!
Either—away with such ineptitude!
Or, wanting energy to break your bonds,
Stick to the good old stories, think the rain
Is—Zeus distilling pickle through a sieve!
Think thunder 's thrown to break Theoros' head
For breaking oaths first! Meanwhile let ourselves
Instruct your progeny you prate like fools
Of father Zeus, who 's but the atmosphere,
Brother Poseidon, otherwise called—sea,
And son Hephaistos—fire and nothing else!
Over which nothings there 's a something still,
"Necessity," that rules the universe
And cares as much about your Choes-feast
Performed or intermitted, as you care

Whether gnats sound their trump from head or tail!'
When, stupefied at such philosophy,
We cry—Arrest the madmen, governor!
Pound hemlock and pour bull's-blood, Perikles!—
Would you believe? The Olumpian bends his brow,
Scarce pauses from his building! 'Say they thus?
Then, they say wisely. Anaxagoras,
I had not known how simple proves eclipse
But for thy teaching! Go, fools, learn like me!'

"Well, Zeus nods: man must reconcile himself,
So, let the Charon's-company harangue,
And Anaxagoras be—as we wish!
A comfort is in nature: while grass grows
And water runs, and sesame pricks tongue,
And honey from Brilesian hollow melts
On mouth, and Bacchis' flavorous lip beats both,
You will not be untaught life's use, young man?
Pho! My young man just proves that panniered ass
Said to have borne Youth strapped on his stout back,
With whom a serpent bargained, bade him swap
The priceless boon for—water to quench thirst!
What 's youth to my young man? In love with age,
He Spartanizes, argues, fasts and frowns,
Denies the plainest rules of life, long since
Proved sound; sets all authority aside,

Must simply recommence things, learn ere act,
And think out thoroughly how youth should pass—
Just as if youth stops passing, all the same!

"One last resource is left us—poetry!
Vindicate nature, prove Plataian help,
Turn out, a thousand strong, all right and tight,
To save Sense, poet! Bang the sophist-brood
Would cheat man out of wholesome sustenance
By swearing wine is water, honey—gall,
Saperdion—the Empousa! Panic-smit,
Our juveniles abstain from Sense and starve:
Be yours to disenchant them! Change things back!
Or better, strain a point the other way
And handsomely exaggerate wronged truth!
Lend wine a glory never gained from grape,
Help honey with a snatch of him we style
The Muses' Bee, bay-bloom-fed Sophokles,
And give Saperdion a Kimberic robe!

"'I, his successor,' gruff the answer grunts,
'Incline to poetize philosophy,
Extend it rather than restrain; as thus—
Are heroes men? No more, and scarce as much,
Shall mine be represented. Are men poor?
Behold them ragged, sick, lame, halt and blind!

Do they use speech? Ay, street-terms, market-phrase!
Having thus drawn sky earthwards, what comes next
But dare the opposite, lift earth to sky?
Mere puppets once, I now make womankind,
For thinking, saying, doing, match the male.
Lift earth? I drop to, dally with, earth's dung!
—Recognize in the very slave—man's mate,
Declare him brave and honest, kind and true,
And reasonable as his lord, in brief.
I paint men as they are—so runs my boast—
Not as they should be: paint—what 's part of man
—Women and slaves—not as, to please your pride,
They should be, but your equals, as they are.
O and the Gods! Instead of abject mien,
Submissive whisper, while my Choros cants
'Zeus,—with thy cubit's length of attributes,—
May I, the ephemeral, ne'er scrutinize
Who made the heaven and earth and all things there!'
Myself shall say' . . . Ay, Herakles may help!
Give me,—I want the very words,—attend!"

He read. Then "Murder 's out,—'There are no Gods,'
Man has no master, owns, by consequence,
No right, no wrong, except to please or plague
His nature: what man likes be man's sole law!
Still, since he likes Saperdion, honey, figs,

Man may reach freedom by your roundabout.
'Never believe yourselves the freer thence!
There are no gods, but there 's "Necessity,"—
Duty enjoined you, fact in figment's place,
Throned on no mountain, native to the mind!
Therefore deny yourselves Saperdion, figs
And honey, for the sake of—what I dream,
A-sitting with my legs up!'

"Infamy!
The poet casts in calm his lot with these
Assailants of Apollon! Sworn to serve
Each Grace, the Furies call him minister—
He, who was born for just that roseate world
Renounced so madly, where what 's false is fact,
Where he makes beauty out of ugliness,
Where he lives, life itself disguised for him
As immortality—so works the spell,
The enthusiastic mood which marks a man
Muse-mad, dream-drunken, wrapt around by verse,
Encircled with poetic atmosphere,
As lark emballed by its own crystal song,
Or rose enmisted by that scent it makes!
No, this were unreality! the real
He wants, not falsehood,—truth alone he seeks,
Truth, for all beauty! Beauty, in all truth—

That 's certain somehow! Must the eagle lilt
Lark-like, needs fir-tree blossom rose-like? No!
Strength and utility charm more than grace,
And what 's most ugly proves most beautiful.
So much assistance from Euripides!

"Whereupon I betake me, since needs must,
To a concluding—'Go and feed the crows!
Do! Spoil your art as you renounce your life,
Poetize your so precious system, do,
Degrade the hero, nullify the god,
Exhibit women, slaves and men as peers,—
Your castigation follows prompt enough!
When all 's concocted upstairs, heels o'er head,
Down must submissive drop the masterpiece
For public praise or blame: so, praise away,
Friend Socrates, wife's-friend Kephisophon!
Boast innovations, cramp phrase, uncouth song,
Hard matter and harsh manner, gods, men, slaves
And women jumbled to a laughing-stock
Which Hellas shall hold sides at lest she split!
Hellas, on these, shall have her word to say!

"She has it and she says it—there 's the curse!—
She finds he makes the shag-rag hero-race,
The noble slaves, wise women, move as much

Pity and terror as true tragic types:
Applauds inventiveness—the plot so new,
The turn and trick subsidiary so strange!
She relishes that homely phrase of life,
That common town-talk, more than trumpet-blasts:
Accords him right to chop and change a myth:
What better right had he, who told the tale
In the first instance, to embellish fact?
This last may disembellish yet improve!
Both find a block: this man carves back to bull
What first his predecessor cut to sphynx:
Such genuine actual roarer, nature's brute,
Intelligible to our time, was sure
The old-world artist's purpose, had he worked
To mind; this both means and makes the thing!
If, past dispute, the verse slips oily-bathed
In unctuous music—say, effeminate—
We also say, like Kuthereia's self,
A lulling effluence which enswathes some isle
Where hides a nymph, not seen but felt the more.
That 's Hellas' verdict!

"Does Euripides
Even so far absolved, remain content?
Nowise! His task is to refine, refine,
Divide, distinguish, subtilize away

Whatever seemed a solid planting-place
For foot-fall,—not in that phantasmal sphere
Proper to poet, but on vulgar earth
Where people used to tread with confidence.
There 's left no longer one plain positive
Enunciation incontestable
Of what is good, right, decent here on earth.
Nobody now can say 'this plot is mine,
Though but a plethron square,—my duty!'—
'Yours?
Mine, or at least not yours,' snaps somebody!
And, whether the dispute be parent-right
Or children's service, husband's privilege
Or wife's submission, there 's a snarling straight,
Smart passage of opposing 'yea' and 'nay,'
'Should,' 'should not,' till, howe'er the contest end,
Spectators go off sighing—Clever thrust!
Why was I so much hurried to pay debt,
Attend my mother, sacrifice an ox,
And set my name down 'for a trireme, good'?
Something I might have urged on t' other side!
No doubt, Chresphontes or Bellerophon
We don't meet every day; but Stab-and-stitch
The tailor—ere I turn the drachmas o'er
I owe him for a chiton, as he thinks,
I 'll pose the blockhead with an argument!

"So has he triumphed, your Euripides!
Oh, I concede, he rarely gained a prize:
That 's quite another matter! cause for that!
Still, when 't was got by Ions, Iophons,
Off he would pace confoundedly superb,
Supreme, no smile at movement on his mouth
Till Sokrates winked, whispered: out it broke!
And Aristullos jotted down the jest,
While Iophons or Ions, bay on brow,
Looked queerly, and the foreigners--like you—
Asked o'er the border with a puzzled smile
—'And so, you value Ions, Iophons,
Euphorions! How about Euripides?'
(Eh, brave bard's-champion? Does the anger boil?
Keep within bounds a moment,—eye and lip
Shall loose their doom on me, their fiery worst!)
What strangers? Archelaos heads the file!
He sympathizes, he concerns himself,
He pens epistle, each successless play:
'Athenai sinks effete; there 's younger blood
In Makedonia. Visit where I rule!
Do honour to me and take gratitude!
Live the guest's life, or work the poet's way,
Which also means the statesman's: he who wrote
Erechtheus may seem rawly politic
At home where Kleophon is ripe; but here

My council-board permits him choice of seats.'

"Now this was operating,—what should prove
A poison-tree, had flowered far on to fruit
For many a year,—when I was moved, first man,
To dare the adventure, down with root and branch.
So, from its sheath I drew my Comic steel,
And dared what I am now to justify.
A serious question first, though!

"Once again!
Do you believe, when I aspired in youth,
I made no estimate of power at all,
Nor paused long, nor considered much, what class
Of fighters I might claim to join, beside
That class wherewith I cast in company?
Say, you—profuse of praise no less than blame—
Could not I have competed—franker phrase
Might trulier correspond to meaning—still,
Competed with your Tragic paragon?
Suppose me minded simply to make verse,
To fabricate, parade resplendent arms,
Flourish and sparkle out a Trilogy,—
Where was the hindrance? But my soul bade 'Fight!
Leave flourishing for mock-foe, pleasure-time;
Prove arms efficient on real heads and hearts!'

How? With degeneracy sapping fast
The Marathonian muscle, nerved of old
To maul the Mede, now strung at best to help
—How did I fable?—War and Hubbub mash
To mincemeat Fatherland and Brotherhood,
Pound in their mortar Hellas, State by State,
That greed might gorge, the while frivolity
Rubbed hands and smacked lips o'er the dainty dish!
Authority, experience—pushed aside
By any upstart who pleads throng and press
O' the people! 'Think, say, do thus!' Wherefore, pray?
'We are the people: who impugns our right
Of choosing Kleon that tans hide so well,
Huperbolos that turns out lamps so trim,
Hemp-seller Eukrates or Lusikles
Sheep-dealer, Kephalos the potter's son,
Diitriphes who weaves the willow-work
To go round bottles, and Nausikudes
The meal-man? Such we choose and more, their mates,
To think and say and do in our behalf!'
While sophistry wagged tongue, emboldened still,
Found matter to propose, contest, defend,
'Stablish, turn topsyturvy,—all the same,
No matter what, provided the result
Were something new in place of something old,—
Set wagging by pure insolence of soul

Which needs must pry into, have warrant for
Each right, each privilege good policy
Protects from curious eye and prating mouth!
Everywhere lust to shape the world anew,
Spurn this Athenai as we find her, build
A new impossible Cloudcuckooburg
For feather-headed birds, once solid men,
Where rules, discarding jolly habitude,
Nourished on myrtle-berries and stray ants,
King Tereus who, turned Hoopoe Triple-Crest,
Shall terrify and bring the gods to terms!

"Where was I? Oh! Things ailing thus—I ask,
What cure? Cut, thrust, hack, hew at heap-on-heaped
Abomination with the exquisite
Palaistra-tool of polished Tragedy?
Erechtheus shall harangue Amphiktuon,
And incidentally drop word of weight
On justice, righteousness, so turn aside
The audience from attacking Sicily!—
The more that Choros, after he recounts
How Phrixos rode the ram, the far-famed Fleece,
Shall add—at last fall of grave dancing-foot—
'Aggression never yet was helped by Zeus!'
That helps or hinders Alkibiades?
As well expect, should Pheidias carve Zeus' self

And set him up, some half a mile away,
His frown would frighten sparrows from your field!
Eagles may recognize their lord, belike,
But as for vulgar sparrows,—change the god,
And plant some big Priapos with a pole!
I wield the Comic weapon rather—hate!
Hate! honest, earnest and directest hate—
Warfare wherein I close with enemy,
Call him one name and fifty epithets,
Remind you his great-grandfather sold bran,
Describe the new exomion, sleeveless coat
He knocked me down last night and robbed me of,
Protest he voted for a tax on air!
And all this hate—if I write Comedy—
Finds tolerance, most like—applause, perhaps
True veneration; for I praise the god
Present in person of his minister,
And pay—the wilder my extravagance—
The more appropriate worship to the Power
Adulterous, night-roaming, and the rest:
Otherwise,—that originative force
Of nature, impulse stirring death to life,
Which, underlying law, seems lawlessness,
Yet is the outbreak which, ere order be,
Must thrill creation through, warm stocks and stones,
Phales Iacchos.

"Comedy for me!
Why not for you, my Tragic masters? Sneaks
Whose art is mere desertion of a trust!
Such weapons lay to hand, the ready club,
The clay-ball, on the ground a stone to snatch,—
Arms fit to bruise the boar's neck, break the chine
O' the wolf,—and you must impiously—despise?
No, I 'll say, furtively let fall that trust
Consigned you! 'T was not 'take or leave alone,'
But 'take and, wielding, recognize your god
In his prime attributes!' And though full soon
You sneaked, subsided into poetry,
Nor met your due reward, still,—heroize
And speechify and sing-song and forego
Far as you may your function,—still its pact
Endures, one piece of early homage still
Exacted of you; after your three bouts
At hoitytoity, great men with long words,
And so forth,—at the end, must tack itself
The genuine sample, the Satyric Play,
Concession, with its wood-boys' fun and freak,
To the true taste of the mere multitude.
Yet, there again! What does your Still-at-itch,
Always-the-innovator? Shrugs and shirks!
Out of his fifty Trilogies, some five
Are somehow suited: Satyrs dance and sing,

Try merriment, a grimly prank or two,
Sour joke squeezed through pursed lips and teeth on edge,
Then quick on top of toe to pastoral sport,
Goat-tending and sheep-herding, cheese and cream,
Soft grass and silver rillets, country-fare—
When throats were promised Thasian! Five such feats,—
Then frankly off he threw the yoke: next Droll,
Next festive drama, covenanted fun,
Decent reversion to indecency,
Proved—your 'Alkestis'! There 's quite fun enough,
Herakles drunk! From out fate's blackening wave
Calamitous, just zigzags some shot star,
Poor promise of faint joy, and turns the laugh
On dupes whose fears and tears were all in waste!

"For which sufficient reasons, in truth's name,
I closed with whom you count the Meaner Muse,
Classed me with Comic Poets who should weld
Dark with bright metal, show their blade may keep
Its adamantine birthright though a-blaze
With poetry, the gold, and wit, the gem,
And strike mere gold, unstiffened out by steel,
Or gem, no iron joints its strength around,
From hand of—posturer, not combatant!

"Such was my purpose: it succeeds, I say!

Have not we beaten Kallikratidas,
Not humbled Sparté? Peace awaits our word,
Spite of Theramenes, and fools his like.
Since my previsions,—warranted too well
By the long war now waged and worn to end—
Had spared such heritage of misery,
My after-counsels scarce need fear repulse.
Athênai, taught prosperity has wings,
Cages the glad recapture. Demos, see,
From folly's premature decrepitude
Boiled young again, emerges from the stew
Of twenty-five years' trouble, sits and sways,
One brilliance and one balsam,—sways and sits
Monarch of Hellas! ay and, sage again,
No longer jeopardizes chieftainship,
No longer loves the brutish demagogue
Appointed by a bestial multitude
But seeks out sound advisers. Who are they?
Ourselves, of parentage proved wise and good!
To such may hap strains thwarting quality,
(As where shall want its flaw mere human stuff?)
Still, the right grain is proper to right race;
What 's contrary, call curious accident!
Hold by the usual! Orchard-grafted tree,
Not wilding, race-horse-sired, not rouncey-born,
Aristocrat, no sausage-selling snob!

Nay, why not Alkibiades, come back
Filled by the Genius, freed of petulance,
Frailty,—mere youthfulness that 's all at fault,—
Advanced to Perikles and something more?
—Being at least our duly born and bred,—
Curse on what chaunoprockt first gained his ear
And got his . . . well, once true man in right place,
Our commonalty soon content themselves
With doing just what they are born to do,
Eat, drink, make merry, mind their own affairs
And leave state-business to the larger brain.
I do not stickle for their punishment;
But certain culprits have a cloak to twitch,
A purse to pay the piper: flog, say I,
Your fine fantastics, paragons of parts,
Who choose to play the important! Far from side
With us, their natural supports, allies,—
And, best by brain, help who are best by birth
To fortify each weak point in the wall
Built broad and wide and deep for permanence
Between what 's high and low, what 's rare and vile,—
They cast their lot perversely in with low
And vile, lay flat the barrier, lift the mob
To dizzy heights where Privilege stood firm.
And then, simplicity become conceit,—
Woman, slave, common soldier, artisan,

Crazy with new-found worth, new-fangled claims,—
These must be taught next how to use their heads
And hands in driving man's right to mob's rule!
What fellows thus inflame the multitude?
Your Sokrates, still crying 'Understand!'
Your Aristullos,—'Argue!' Last and worst,
Should, by good fortune, mob still hesitate,
Remember there 's degree in heaven and earth,
Cry 'Aischulos enjoined us fear the gods,
And Sophokles advised respect the kings!'
Why, your Euripides informs them—'Gods?
They are not! Kings? They are, but . . . do not I,
In Suppliants, make my Theseus,—yours, no more,—
Fire up at insult of who styles him King?
Play off that Herald, I despise the most,
As patronizing kings' prerogative
Against a Theseus proud to dare no step
Till he consult the people?'

"Such as these—
Ah, you expect I am for strangling straight?
Nowise, Balaustion! All my roundabout
Ends at beginning, with my own defence.
I dose each culprit just with—Comedy.
Let each be doctored in exact the mode
Himself prescribes: by words, the word-monger—

My words to his words,—my lies, if you like,
To his lies. Sokrates I nickname thief,
Quack, necromancer; Aristullos,—say,
Male Kirké who bewitches and bewrays
And changes folk to swine; Euripides,—
Well, I acknowledge! Every word is false,
Looked close at; but stand distant and stare through,
All 's absolute indubitable truth
Behind lies, truth which only lies declare!
For come, concede me truth 's in thing not word,
Meaning not manner! Love smiles 'rogue' and 'wretch'
When 'sweet' and 'dear' seem vapid: Hate adopts
Love's 'sweet' and 'dear' when 'rogue' and 'wretch
fall flat:
Love, Hate—are truths, then, each, in sense not sound.
Further: if Love, remaining Love, fell back
On 'sweet' and 'dear,'—if Hate, though Hate the same,
Dropped down to 'rogue' and 'wretch,'—each phrase
were false.
Good! and now grant I hate no matter whom
With reason: I must therefore fight my foe,
Finish the mischief which made enmity.
How? By employing means to most hurt him
Who much harmed me. What way did he do harm?
Through word or deed? Through word? with word,
wage war!

Word with myself directly? As direct
Reply shall follow: word to you, the wise,
Whence indirectly came the harm to me?
What wisdom I can muster waits on such.
Word to the populace which, misconceived
By ignorance and incapacity,
Ends in no such effect as follows cause
When I, or you the wise, are reasoned with,
So damages what I and you hold dear?
In that event, I ply the populace
With just such word as leavens their whole lump
To the right ferment for my purpose. *They*
Arbitrate properly between us both?
They weigh my answer with his argument,
Match quip with quibble, wit with eloquence?
All they attain to understand is—blank!
Two adversaries differ: which is right
And which is wrong, none takes on him to say,
Since both are unintelligible. Pooh!
Swear my foe's mother vended herbs she stole,
They fall a-laughing! Add,—his household drudge
Of all-work justifies that office well,
Kisses the wife, composing him the play,—
They grin at whom they gaped in wonderment,
And go off—'Was he such a sorry scrub?
This other seems to know! we praised too fast!'

Why then, my lies have done the work of truth,
Since 'scrub,' improper designation, means
Exactly what the proper argument
—Had such been comprehensible—proposed
To proper audience—were I graced with such—
Would properly result in; so your friend
Gets an impartial verdict on his verse
'The tongue swears, but the soul remains unsworn!

"There, my Balaustion! All is summed and said.
No other cause of quarrel with yourself!
Euripides and Aristophanes
Differ: he needs must round our difference
Into the mob's ear; with the mob I plead.
You angrily start forward 'This to me?'
No speck of this on you the thrice refined!
Could parley be restricted to us two,
My first of duties were to clear up doubt
As to our true divergence each from each.
Does my opinion so diverge from yours?
Probably less than little—not at all!
To know a matter, for my very self
And intimates—that 's one thing; to imply
By 'knowledge'—loosing whatsoe'er I know
Among the vulgar who, by mere mistake,
May brain themselves and me in consequence,—

That 's quite another. 'O the daring flight!
This only bard maintains the exalted brow,
Nor grovels in the slime nor fears the gods!'
Did *I* fear—*I* play superstitious fool,
Who, with the due proviso, introduced,
Active and passive, their whole company
As creatures too absurd for scorn itself?
Zeus? I have styled him—'slave, mere thrashing-block!'
I 'll tell you: in my very next of plays,
At Bacchos' feast, in Bacchos' honour, full
In front of Bacchos' representative,
I mean to make main-actor—Bacchos' self!
Forth shall he strut, apparent, first to last,
A blockhead, coward, braggart, liar, thief,
Demonstrated all these by his own mere
Xanthias the man-slave: such man shows such god
Shamed to brute-beastship by comparison!
And when ears have their fill of his abuse,
And eyes are sated with his pummelling,—
My Choros taking care, by, all the while,
Singing his glory, that men recognize
A god in the abused and pummelled beast,—
Then, should one ear be stopped of auditor,
Should one spectator shut revolted eye,—
Why, the Priest's self will first raise outraged voice

'Back, thou barbarian, thou ineptitude!
Does not most license hallow best our day,
And least decorum prove its strictest rite?
Since Bacchos bids his followers play the fool,
And there 's no fooling like a majesty
Mocked at,—who mocks the god, obeys the law—
Law which, impute but indiscretion to,
And . . . why, the spirit of Euripides
Is evidently active in the world!'
Do I stop here? No! feat of flightier force!
See Hermes! what commotion raged,—reflect!—
When imaged god alone got injury
By drunkards' frolic! How Athenai stared
Aghast, then fell to frenzy, fit on fit,—
Ever the last the longest! At this hour,
The craze abates a little; so, my Play
Shall have up Hermes: and a Karion, slave,
(Since there 's no getting lower) calls our friend
The profitable god, we honour so,
Whatever contumely fouls the mouth—
Bids him go earn more honest livelihood
By washing tripe in well-trough—wash he does,
Duly obedient! Have I dared my best?
Asklepios, answer!—deity in vogue,
Who visits Sophokles familiarly,
If you believe the old man,—at his age,

Living is dreaming, and strange guests haunt door
Of house, belike, peep through and tap at times
When a friend yawns there, waiting to be fetched,—
At any rate, to memorize the fact,
He has spent money, set an altar up
In the god's temple, now in much repute.
That temple-service trust me to describe—
Cheaters and choused, the god, his brace of girls,
Their snake, and how they manage to snap gifts
'And consecrate the same into a bag,'
For whimsies done away with in the dark!
As if, a stone's throw from that theatre
Whereon I thus unmask their dupery,
The thing were not religious and august!

"Of Sophokles himself—nor word nor sign
Beyond a harmless parody or so!
He founds no anti-school, upsets no faith,
But, living, lets live, the good easy soul
Who,—if he saves his cash, unpoetlike,
Loves wine and—never mind what other sport,
Boasts for his father just a sword-blade-smith,
Proves but queer captain when the people claim,
For one who conquered with 'Antigone,'
The right to undertake a squadron's charge,—
And needs the son's help now to finish plays,

Seeing his dotage calls for governance
And Iophon to share his property,—
Why, of all this, reported true, I breathe
Not one word—true or false, I like the man.
Sophokles lives and lets live: long live he!
Otherwise,—sharp the scourge and hard the blow!

"And what 's my teaching but—accept the old,
Contest the strange! acknowledge work that 's done,
Misdoubt men who have still their work to do!
Religions, laws and customs, poetries,
Are old? So much achieved victorious truth!
Each work was product of a life-time, wrung
From each man by an adverse world: for why?
He worked, destroying other older work
Which the world loved and so was loth to lose.
Whom the world beat in battle—dust and ash!
Who beat the world, left work in evidence,
And wears its crown till new men live new lives,
And fight new fights, and triumph in their turn.
I mean to show you on the stage: you 'll see
My Just Judge only venture to decide
Between two suitors, which is god, which man,
By thrashing both of them as flesh can bear.
You shall agree,—whichever bellows first,
He 's human; who holds longest out, divine:

That is the only equitable test.
Cruelty? Pray, who pricked them on to court
My thong's award? Must they needs dominate?
Then I—rebel. Their instinct grasps the new?
Mine bids retain the old: a fight must be,
And which is stronger the event will show.
O but the pain! Your proved divinity
Still smarts all reddened? And the rightlier served!
Was not some man's-flesh in him, after all?
Do let us lack no frank acknowledgment
There 's nature common to both gods and men!
All of them—spirit? What so winced was clay.
Away pretence to some exclusive sphere
Cloud-nourishing a sole selected few
Fume-fed with self-superiority!
I stand up for the common coarse-as-clay
Existence,—stamp and ramp with heel and hoof
On solid vulgar life, you fools disown.
Make haste from your unreal eminence,
And measure lengths with me upon that ground
Whence this mud-pellet sings and summons you!
I know the soul, too, how the spark ascends
And how it drops apace and dies away.
I am your poet-peer, man thrice your match.
I too can lead an airy life when dead,
Fly like Kinesias when I 'm cloudward bound;

But here, no death shall mix with life it mars.

"So, my old enemy who caused the fight,
Own I have beaten you, Euripides!
Or,—if your advocate would contravene,—
Help him, Balaustion! Use the rosy strength!
I have not done my utmost,—treated you
As I might Aristullos, mint-perfumed,—
Still, let the whole rage burst in brave attack!
Don't pay the poor ambiguous compliment
Of fearing any pearl-white knuckled fist
Will damage this broad buttress of a brow!
Fancy yourself my Aristonumos,
Ameipsias or Sannurion: punch and pound!
Three cuckoos who cry 'cuckoo'! much I care!
They boil a stone! *Neblaretai! Rattei!*"

Cannot your task have end here, Euthukles?
Day by day glides our galley on its path:
Still sunrise and still sunset, Rhodes half-reached,
And still, my patient scribe! no sunset's peace
Descends more punctual than that brow's incline
O'er tablets which your serviceable hand
Prepares to trace. Why treasure up, forsooth,
These relics of a night that make me rich,

But, half-remembered merely, leave so poor
Each stranger to Athenai and her past?
For—how remembered! As some greedy hind
Persuades a honeycomb, beyond the due,
To yield its hoarding,—heedless what alloy
Of the poor bee's own substance taints the gold
Which, unforced, yields few drops, but purity,—
So would you fain relieve of load this brain,
Though the hived thoughts must bring away, with strength,
What words and weakness, strength's receptacle—
Wax from the store! Yet,—aching soothed away,—
Accept the compound! No suspected scent
But proves some rose was rifled, though its ghost
Scarce lingers with what promised musk and myrrh.
No need of farther squeezing. What remains
Can only be Balaustion, just her speech.

Ah, but—because speech serves a purpose still!—

He ended with that flourish. I replied,

Fancy myself your Aristonumos?
Advise me, rather, to remain myself,
Balaustion,—mindful what mere mouse confronts
The forest-monarch Aristophanes!

I who, a woman, claim no quality
Beside the love of all things loveable
Created by a power pre-eminent
In knowledge, as in love I stand perchance,
—You, the consummately-creative! How
Should I, then, dare deny submissive trust
To any process aiming at result
Such as you say your songs are pregnant with?
Result, all judge: means, let none scrutinize
Save those aware how glory best is gained
By daring means to end, ashamed of shame,
Constant in faith that only good works good,
While evil yields no fruit but impotence!
Graced with such plain good, I accept the means.
Nay, if result itself in turn become
Means,—who shall say?—to ends still loftier yet,—
Though still the good prove hard to understand,
The bad still seemingly predominate,—
Never may I forget which order bears
The burden, toils to win the great reward,
And finds, in failure, the grave punishment,
So, meantime, claims of me a faith I yield!
Moreover, a mere woman, I recoil
From what may prove man's-work permissible,
Imperative. Rough strokes surprise: what then?
Some lusty armsweep needs must cause the crash

Of thorn and bramble, ere those shrubs, those flowers,
We fain would have earth yield exclusively,
Are sown, matured and garlanded for boys
And girls, who know not how the growth was gained.
Finally, am I not a foreigner?
No born and bred Athenian,—isled about,
I scarce can drink, like you, at every breath,
Just some particular doctrine which may best
Explain the strange thing I revolt against—
How—by involvement, who may extricate?—
Religion perks up through impiety,
Law leers with licence, folly wise-like frowns,
The seemly lurks inside the abominable.
But opposites,—each neutralizes each
Haply by mixture: what should promise death,
May haply give the good ingredient force,
Disperse in fume the antagonistic ill.
This institution, therefore,—Comedy,—
By origin, a rite,—by exercise,
Proved an achievement tasking poet's power
To utmost, eking legislation out
Beyond the legislator's faculty,
Playing the censor where the moralist
Declines his function, far too dignified
For dealing with minute absurdities:
By efficacy,—virtue's guard, the scourge

Of vice, each folly's fly-flap, arm in aid
Of all that 's righteous, customary, sound
And wholesome; sanctioned therefore,—better say,
Prescribed for fit acceptance of this age
By, not alone the long recorded roll
Of earlier triumphs but, success to-day—
(The multitude as prompt recipient still
Of good gay teaching from that monitor
They crowned this morning—Aristophanes—
As when Sousarion's car first traversed street)·
This product of Athenai—*I* dispute,
Impugn? There 's just one only circumstance
Explains that! I, poor critic, see, hear, feel;
But eyes, ears, senses prove me—foreigner!
Who shall gainsay that the raw new-come guest
Blames oft, too sensitive? On every side
Of—larger than your stage—life's spectacle,
Convention here permits and there forbids
Impulse and action, nor alleges more
Than some mysterious "So do all, and so
Does no one:" which the hasty stranger blames
Because, who bends the head unquestioning,
Transgresses, turns to wrong what else were right,
By failure of a reference to law
Beyond convention; blames unjustly, too—
As if, through that defect, all gained were lost

And slave-brand set on brow indelibly;—
Blames unobservant or experienceless
That men, like trees, if stout and sound and sane,
Show stem no more affected at the root
By bough's exceptional submissive dip
Of leaf and bell, light danced at end of spray
To windy fitfulness in wayward sport—
No more lie prostrate—than low files of flower
Which, when the blast goes by, unruffled raise
Each head again o'er ruder meadow-wreck
Of thorn and thistle that refractory
Demurred to cower at passing wind's caprice.
Why shall not guest extend like charity,
Conceive how,—even when astounded most
That natives seem to acquiesce in muck
Changed by prescription, they affirm, to gold,—
Such may still bring to test, still bear away
Safely and surely much of good and true
Though latent ore, themselves unspecked, unspoiled?
Fresh bathed i' the icebrook, any hand may pass
A placid moment through the lamp's fierce flame:
And who has read your Lemnians seen The Hours,
Heard Female-Playhouse-seat-Preoccupants,
May feel no worse effect than, once a year,
Those who leave decent vesture, dress in rags
And play the mendicant, conform thereby

To country's rite, and then, no beggar-taint
Retained, don vesture due next morrow-day.
What if I share the stranger's weakness then?
Well, could I also show his strength, his sense
Untutored, ay!—but then untampered with!

I fancy, though the world seems old enough,
Though Hellas be the sole unbarbarous land,
Years may conduct to such extreme of age,
And outside Hellas so isles new may lurk,
That haply,—when and where remain a dream!—
In fresh days when no Hellas fills the world,
In novel lands as strange where, all the same,
Their men and women yet behold, as we,
Blue heaven, black earth, and love, hate, hope and fear,
Over again, unhelped by Attiké—
Haply some philanthropic god steers bark,
Gift-laden, to the lonely ignorance
Islanded, say, where mist and snow mass hard
To metal—ay, those Kassiterides!
Then asks: "Ye apprehend the human form.
What of this statue, made to Pheidias' mind,
This picture, as it pleased our Zeuxis paint?
Ye too feel truth, love beauty: judge of these!"
Such strangers may judge feebly, stranger-like:
"Each hair too indistinct—for, see our own!

Hands, not skin-coloured as these hands we have,
And lo, the want of due decorum here!
A citizen, arrayed in civic garb,
Just as he walked your streets apparently,
Yet wears no sword by side, adventures thus,
In thronged Athenai! foolish painter's-freak!
While here 's his brother-sculptor found at fault
Still more egregiously, who shames the world,
Shows wrestler, wrestling at the public games,
Atrociously exposed from head to foot!"
Sure, the Immortal would impart at once
Our slow-stored knowledge, how small truths suppressed
Conduce to the far greater truth's display,—
Would replace simple by instructed sense,
And teach them how Athenai first so tamed
The natural fierceness that her progeny
Discarded arms nor feared the beast in man:
Wherefore at games, where earth's wise gratitude,
Proved by responsive culture, claimed the prize
For man's mind, body, each in excellence,—
When mind had bared itself, came body's turn,
And only irreligion grudged the gods
One naked glory of their master-work
Where all is glorious rightly understood,—
The human frame; enough that man mistakes:
Let him not think the gods mistaken too!

But, peradventure, if the stranger's eye
Detected . . . Ah, too high my fancy-flight!
Pheidias, forgive, and Zeuxis bear with me—
How on your faultless should I fasten fault
Of my own framing, even? Only say,—
Suppose the impossible were realized,
And some as patent incongruity,
Unseemliness,—of no more warrant, there
And then, than now and here, whate'er the time
And place,—I say, the Immortal—who can doubt?—
Would never shrink, but own "The blot escaped
Our artist: thus he shows humanity."

May stranger tax one peccant part in thee,
Poet, three-parts divine? May I proceed?

"Comedy is prescription and a rite."
Since when? No growth of the blind antique time,
"It rose in Attiké with liberty;
When freedom falls, it too will fall." Scarce so!
Your games,—the Olympian, Zeus gave birth to these;
Your Pythian,—these were Phoibos' institute.
Isthmian, Nemeian,—Theseus, Herakles
Appointed each, the boys and barbers say!
Earth's day is growing late: where 's Comedy
"Oh, that commenced an age since,—two, belike,—

In Megara, whence here they brought the thing!
Or I misunderstand, or here 's the fact—
Your grandsire could recall that rustic song,
How suchanone was thief, and miser such
And how,—immunity from chastisement
Once promised to bold singers of the same
By daylight on the drunkard's holiday,—
The clever fellow of the joyous troop
Tried acting what before he sang about,
Acted and stole, or hoarded, acting too:
While his companions ranged a-row, closed up
For Choros,—bade the general rabblement
Sit, see, hear, laugh,—not join the dance themselves.
Soon, the same clever fellow found a mate,
And these two did the whole stage-mimicking,
Still closer in approach to Tragedy,—
So led the way to Aristophanes,
Whose grandsire saw Sousarion, and whose sire—
Chionides; yourself wrote "Banqueters"
When Aischulos had made "Prometheus," nay,
All of the marvels; Sophokles,—I 'll cite,
"Oidipous"—and Euripides—I bend
The head—"Medeia" henceforth awed the world!
"Banqueters," "Babylonians"—next come you!
Surely the great days that left Hellas free
Happened before such advent of huge help,

Eighty-years-late assistance? Marathon,
Plataia, Salamis were fought, I think,
Before new educators stood reproved,
Or foreign legates blushed, excepted to!
Where did the helpful rite pretend its rise?
Did it break forth, as gifts divine are wont,
Plainly authentic, incontestably
Adequate to the helpful ordinance?
Founts, dowered with virtue, pulse out pure from source;
'T is there we taste the god's benign intent:
Not when,—fatigued away by journey, foul
With brutish trampling,—crystal sinks to slime,
And lymph forgets the first salubriousness.
Sprang Comedy to light thus crystal-pure?
"Nowise!" yourself protest with vehemence;
"Gross, bestial, did the clowns' diversion break;
Every successor paddled in the slush;
Nay, my contemporaries one and all
Gay played the mudlark till I joined their game;
Then was I first to change buffoonery
For wit, and stupid filth for cleanly sense,
Transforming pointless joke to purpose fine,
Transfusing rude enforcement of home-law—
'Drop knave's-tricks, deal more neighbour-like, ye boors!'—
With such new glory of poetic breath

As, lifting application far past use
O' the present, launched it o'er men's lowly heads
To future time, when high and low alike
Are dead and done with, while my airy power
Flies disengaged, as vapour from what stuff
It—say not, dwelt in—fitlier, dallied with
To forward work, which done,—deliverance brave,—
It soars away, and mud subsides to dust.
Say then, myself invented Comedy!"

So mouths full many a famed Parabasis!
Agreed! No more, then, of prescriptive use,
Authorization by antiquity,
For what offends our judgment! 'T is your work,
Performed your way: not work delivered you
Intact, intact producible in turn.
Everywhere have you altered old to new—
Your will, your warrant: therefore, work must stand
Or stumble by intrinsic worth. What worth?
Its aim and object! Peace you advocate,
And war would fain abolish from the land:
Support religion, lash irreverence,
Yet laughingly administer rebuke
To superstitious folly,—equal fault!
While innovating rashness, lust of change,
New laws, new habits, manners, men and things,

Make your main quarry,—"oldest" meaning "best."
You check the fretful litigation-itch,
Withstand mob-rule, expose mob-flattery,
Punish mob-favourites; most of all press hard
On sophists who assist the demagogue,
And poets their accomplices in crime.
Such your main quarry: by the way, you strike
Ignobler game, mere miscreants, snob or scamp,
Cowardly, gluttonous, effeminate:
Still with a bolt to spare when dramatist
Proves haply unproficient in his art.
Such aims—alone, no matter for the means—
Declare the unexampled excellence
Of their first author—Aristophanes!

Whereat—Euripides, oh, not thyself—
Augustlier than the need!—thy century
Of subjects dreamed and dared and done, before
"Banqueters" gave dark earth enlightenment,
Or "Babylonians" played Prometheus here,—
These let me summon to defend thy cause!
Lo, as indignantly took life and shape
Labour by labour, all of Herakles,—
Palpably fronting some o'erbold pretence
"Eurustheus slew the monsters, purged the world!"
So shall each poem pass you and imprint

Shame on the strange assurance. *You* praised Peace?
Sing him full-face, Kresphontes! "Peace" the theme?
"Peace, in whom depths of wealth lie,—of the blest
Immortals beauteousest,—
Come! for the heart within me dies away,
So long dost thou delay!
O I have feared lest old age, much annoy,
Conquer me, quite outstrip the tardy joy,
Thy gracious triumph-season I would see,
The song, the dance, the sport, profuse of crowns to be
But come! for my sake, goddess great and dear,
Come to the city here!
Hateful Sedition drive thou from our homes,
With Her who madly roams
Rejoicing in the steel against the life
That 's whetted—banish Strife!"

Shall I proceed? No need of next and next!
That were too easy, play so presses play,
Trooping tumultuous, each with instance apt,
Each eager to confute the idle boast.
What virtue but stands forth panegyrized,
What vice, unburned by stigma, in the books
Which bettered Hellas,—beyond graven gold
Or gem-indenture, sung by Phoibos' self
And saved in Kunthia's mountain treasure-house—

Ere you, man, moralist, were youth or boy?
—Not praise which, in the proffer, mocks the praised
By sly admixture of the blameworthy
And enforced coupling of base fellowship,—
Not blame which gloats the while it frowning laughs,
"Allow one glance on horrors—laughable!"—
This man's entire of heart and soul, discharged
Its love or hate, each unalloyed by each,
On objects worthy either; earnestness,
Attribute him, and power! but novelty?
Nor his nor yours a doctrine—all the world's!
What man of full-grown sense and sanity
Holds other than the truth,—wide Hellas through,—
Though truth, he acts, discredit truth he holds?
What imbecile has dared to formulate
"Love war, hate peace, become a litigant!"—
And so preach on, reverse each rule of right
Because he quarrels, combats, goes to law?
No, for his comment runs, with smile or sigh
According to heart's temper, "Peace were best,
Except occasions when we put aside
Peace, and bid all the blessings in her gift
Quick join the crows, for sake of Marathon!"

"Nay," you reply; for one, whose mind withstands
His heart, and, loving peace, for conscience' sake

Wants war,—you find a crowd of hypocrites
Whose conscience means ambition, grudge and greed.
On such, reproof, sonorous doctrine, melts
Distilled like universal but thin dew
Which all too sparsely covers country: dear,
No doubt, to universal crop and clown,
Still, each bedewed keeps his own head-gear dry
With upthrust *skiadeion*, shakes adroit
The droppings to his neighbour. No! collect
All of the moisture, leave unhurt the heads
Which nowise need a washing, save and store
And dash the whole condensed to one fierce spout
On some one evildoer, sheltered close,—
The fool supposed,—till you beat guard away,
And showed your audience, not that war was wrong,
But Lamachos absurd,—case, crests and all,—
Not that democracy was blind of choice,
But Kleon and Huperbolos were shams:
Not superstition vile, but Nikias crazed,—
The concrete for the abstract; that 's the way!
What matters Choros crying "Hence, impure!"
You cried "Ariphrades does thus and thus!"
Now, earnestness seems never earnest more
Than when it dons for garb—indifference;
So there 's much laughing: but, compensative,
When frowning follows laughter, then indeed

Scout innuendo, sarcasm, irony!—
Wit's polished warfare glancing at first graze
From off hard headpiece, coarsely-coated brain
O' the commonalty—whom, unless you prick
To purpose, what avails that finer pates
Succumb to simple scratching? Those—not these—
'T is Multitude, which, moved, fines Lamachos,
Banishes Kleon and burns Sokrates,
House over head, or, better, poisons him.
Therefore in dealing with King Multitude,
Club-drub the callous numskulls! In and in
Beat this essential consequential fact
That here they have a hater of the three,
Who hates in word, phrase, nickname, epithet
And illustration, beyond doubt at all!
And similarly, would you win assent
To—Peace, suppose? You tickle the tough hide
With good plain pleasure her concomitant—
And, past mistake again, exhibit Peace—
Peace, vintager and festive, cheesecake-time,
Hare-slice-and-peasoup-season, household joy:
Theoria's beautiful belongings match
Opora's lavish condescendings: brief,
Since here the people are to judge, you press
Such argument as people understand:
If with exaggeration—what care you?

Have I misunderstood you in the main?
No! then must answer be, such argument,
Such policy, no matter what good love
Or hate it help, in practice proves absurd,
Useless and null: henceforward intercepts
Sober effective blow at what you blame,
And renders nugatory rightful praise
Of thing or person. The coarse brush has daubed—
What room for the fine limner's pencil-mark?
Blame? You curse, rather, till who blames must blush—
Lean to apology or praise, more like!
Does garment, simpered o'er as white, prove grey?
"Black, blacker than Acharnian charcoal, black
Beyond Kimmerian, Stugian blackness black,"
You bawl, till men sigh "nearer snowiness!"
What follows? What one faint-rewarding fall
Of foe belaboured ne'er so lustily?
Laugh Lamachos from out the people's heart?
He died, commanding, "hero," say yourself!
Gibe Nikias into privacy?—nay, shake
Kleon a little from his arrogance
By cutting him to shoe-sole-shreds? I think,
He ruled his life long and, when time was ripe,
Died fighting for amusement,—good tough hide!
Sokrates still goes up and down the streets,
And Aristullos puts his speech in book,

When both should be abolished long ago.
Nay, wretchedest of rags, Ariphrades—
You have been fouling that redoubtable
Harp-player, twenty years, with what effect?
Still he strums on, strums ever cheerily,
And earns his wage,—"Who minds a joke?" men say.
No, friend! The statues stand—mudstained at most—
Titan or pygmy: what achieves their fall
Will be, long after mud is flung and spent,
Some clear thin spirit-thrust of lightning—truth!

Your praise, then—honey-smearing helps your friend,
More than blame's ordure-smirch hurts foe, perhaps?
Peace, now, misunderstood, ne'er prized enough,
You have interpreted to ignorance
Till ignorance opes eye, bat-blind before,
And for the first time knows Peace means the power
On maw of pan-cake, cheese-cake, barley-cake,
No stop nor stint to stuffing. While, in camp,
Who fights chews rancid tunny, onions raw,
Peace sits at cosy feast with lamp and fire,
Complaisant smooth-sleeked flute-girls giggling gay.
How thick and fast the snow falls, freezing War
Who shrugs, campaigns it, and may break a shin
Or twist an ankle! come, who hesitates
To give Peace, over War, the preference?

Ah, friend—had this indubitable fact
Haply occurred to poor Leonidas,
How had he turned tail on Thermopulai!
It cannot be that even his few wits
Were addled to the point that, so advised,
Preposterous he had answered—"Cakes are prime,
Hearth-sides are snug, sleek dancing-girls have worth,
And yet—for country's sake, to save our gods
Their temples, save our ancestors their tombs,
Save wife and child and home and liberty,—
I would chew sliced-salt-fish, bear snow—nay, starve,
If need were,—and by much prefer the choice!"
Why, friend, your genuine hero, all the while,
Has been—who served precisely for your butt—
Kleonumos that, wise, cast shield away
On battle-ground; cried "Cake my buckler be,
Embossed with cream-clot! peace, not war, I choose,
Holding with Dikaiopolis!" Comedy
Shall triumph, Dikaiopolis win assent,
When Miltiades shall next shirk Marathon,
Themistokles swap Salamis for—cake,
And Kimon grunt "Peace, grant me dancing-girls!"
But sooner, hardly! twenty-five years since,
The war began,—such pleas for Peace have reached
A reasonable age. The end shows all.

And so with all the rest you advocate!
"Wise folk leave litigation! 'ware the wasps!
Whoso loves law and lawyers, heliast-like,
Wants hemlock!" None shows that so funnily.
But, once cure madness, how comports himself
Your sane exemplar, what 's our gain thereby?
Philokleon turns Bdelukleon! just this change,—
New sanity gets straightway drunk as sow,
Cheats baker-wives, brawls, kicks, cuffs, curses folk,
Parades a shameless flute-girl, bandies filth
With his own son who cured his father's cold
By making him catch fever—funnily!
But as for curing love of lawsuits—faugh!

And how does new improve upon the old
—Your boast—in even abusing? Rough, may be—
Still, honest was the old mode. "Call thief—thief!"
But never call thief even—murderer!
Much less call fop and fribble, worse one whit
Than fribble and fop! Spare neither! beat your brains
For adequate invective,—cut the life
Clean out each quality,—but load your lash
With no least lie, or we pluck scourge from hand!
Does poet want a whipping, write bad verse,
Inculcate foul deeds? There 's the fault to flog!
You vow "The rascal cannot read nor write,

Spends more in buying fish than Morsimos,
Somebody helps his Muse and courts his wife,
His uncle deals in crockery, and last,—
Himself 's a stranger!" That 's the cap and crown
Of stinging-nettle, that 's the master-stroke!
What poet-rival,—after "housebreaker,"
"Fish-gorging," "midnight footpad" and so forth,—
Proves not, beside, "a stranger"? Chased from charge
To charge, and, lie by lie, laughed out of court,—
Lo, wit's sure refuge, satire's grand resource—
All, from Kratinos downward—"strangers" they!
Pity the trick 's too facile! None so raw
Among your playmates but have caught the ball
And sent it back as briskly to—yourself!
You too, my Attic, are styled "stranger"—Rhodes,
Aigina, Lindos or Kameiros,—nay,
'T was Egypt reared, if Eupolis be right,
Who wrote the comedy (Kratinos vows)
Kratinos helped a little! Kleon's self
Was nigh promoted Comic, when he haled
My poet into court, and o'er the coals
Hauled and re-hauled "the stranger,—insolent,
Who brought out plays, usurped our privilege!"
Why must you Comics one and all take stand
On lower ground than truth from first to last?
Why all agree to let folk disbelieve,

So laughter but reward a funny lie?
Repel such onslaughts—answer, sad and grave,
Your fancy-fleerings—who would stoop so low?
Your own adherents whisper,—when disgust
Too menacingly thrills Logeion through
At—Perikles invents this present war
Because men robbed his mistress of three maids—
Or—Sokrates wants burning, house o'er head,—
"What, so obtuse, not read between the lines?
Our poet means no mischief! All should know—
Ribaldry here implies a compliment!
He deals with things, not men,—his men are things—
Each represents a class, plays figure-head
And names the ship: no meaner than the first
Would serve; he styles a trireme 'Sokrates'—
Fears 'Sokrates' may prove unseaworthy
(That 's merely—'Sophists are the bane of boys')
Rat-riddled ('they are capable of theft'),
Rotten or whatsoe'er shows ship-disease,
('They war with gods and worship whirligig').
You never took the joke for earnest? scarce
Supposed mere figure-head meant entire ship,
And Sokrates—the whole fraternity?"

This then is Comedy, our sacred song,
Censor of vice, and virtue's guard as sure:

Manners-instructing, morals' stop-estray,
Which, born a twin with public liberty,
Thrives with its welfare, dwindles with its wane!
Liberty? what so exquisitely framed
And fitted to suck dry its life of life
To last faint fibre?—since that life is truth.
You who profess your indignation swells
At sophistry, when specious words confuse
Deeds right and wrong, distinct before, you say—
(Though all that 's done is—dare veracity,
Show that the true conception of each deed
Affirmed, in vulgar parlance, "wrong" or "right,"
Proves to be neither, as the hasty hold,
But, change your side, shoots light, where dark alone
Was apprehended by the vulgar sense)
You who put sophistry to shame, and shout
"There 's but a single side to man and thing;
A side so much more big than thing or man
Possibly can be, that—believe 't is true?
Such were too marvellous simplicity!"—
Confess, those sophists whom yourself depict,
(—Abide by your own painting!) what they teach,
They wish at least their pupil to believe,
And, what believe, to practise! Did *you* wish
Hellas should haste, as taught, with torch in hand,
And fire the horrid Speculation-shop?

Straight the shop's master rose and showed the mob
What man was your so monstrous Sokrates;
Himself received amusement, why not they?
Just as did Kleon first play magistrate
And bid you put your birth in evidence—
Since no unbadged buffoon is licensed here
To shame us all when foreign guests may mock—
Then,—birth established, fooling licensed you,—
He, duty done, resumed mere auditor,
Laughed with the loudest at his Lamia-shape,
Kukloboros-roaring, and the camel-rest.
Nay, Aristullos,—once your volley spent
On the male-Kirké and her swinish crew,—
PLATON,—so others call the youth we love,—
Sends your performance to the curious king—
"Do you desire to know Athenai's knack
At turning seriousness to pleasantry?
Read this! One Aristullos means myself.
The author is indeed a merry grig!"
Nay, it would seem as if yourself were bent
On laying down the law "Tell lies I must—
Aforethought and of purpose, no mistake!"
When forth yourself step, tell us from the stage
"Here you behold the King of Comedy—
Me, who, the first, have purged my every piece
From each and all my predecessors' filth,

Abjured those satyr-adjuncts sewn to bid
The boys laugh, satyr-jokes whereof not one
Least sample but would make my hair turn grey
Beyond a twelvemonth's ravage! I renounce
Mountebank-claptrap, such as firework-fizz
And torchflare, or else nuts and barleycorns
Scattered among the crowd, to scramble for
And stop their mouths with; no such stuff shames me!
Who,—what 's more serious,—know both when to strike
And when to stay my hand: once dead, my foe,
Why, done, my fighting! *I* attack a corpse?
I spare the corpse-like even! punish age?
I pity from my soul that sad effete
Toothless old mumbler called Kratinos! once
My rival,—now, alack, the dotard slinks
Ragged and hungry to what hole 's his home;
Ay, slinks thro' byways where no passenger
Flings him a bone to pick. You formerly
Adored the Muses' darling: dotard now,
Why, he may starve! O mob most mutable!"
So you harangued in person; while,—to point
Precisely out, these were but lies you launched,—
Prompt, a play followed primed with satyr-frisks,
No spice spared of the stomach-turning stew,
Full-fraught with torch-display, and barley-throw,
And Kleon, dead enough, bedaubed afresh;

While daft Kratinos—home to hole trudged he,
Wrung dry his wit to the last vinous dregs,
Decanted them to "Bottle,"—beat, next year,—
"Bottle" and dregs—your best of "Clouds" and dew!
Where, Comic King, may keenest eye detect
Improvement on your predecessors' work
Except in lying more audaciously?

Why—genius! That 's the grandeur, that 's the gold—
That 's *you*—superlatively true to touch—
Gold, leaf or lump—gold, anyhow the mass
Takes manufacture and proves Pallas' casque
Or, at your choice, simply a cask to keep
Corruption from decay. Your rivals' hoard
May ooze forth, lacking such preservative:
Yours cannot—gold plays guardian far too well!
Genius, I call *you*: dross, your rivals share;
Ay, share and share alike, too! says the world,
However you pretend supremacy
In aught beside that gold, your very own.
Satire? "Kratinos for our satirist!"
The world cries. Elegance? "Who elegant
As Eupolis?" resounds as noisily.
Artistic fancy? Choros-creatures quaint?
Magnes invented "Birds" and "Frogs" enough,
Archippos punned, Hegemon parodied,

To heart's content, before you stepped on stage.
Moral invective? Eupolis exposed
"That prating beggar, he who stole the cup,"
Before your "Clouds" rained grime on Sokrates;
Nay, what beat "Clouds" but "Konnos," muck for mud?
Courage? How long before, well-masked, you poured
Abuse on Eukrates and Lusikles,
Did Teleklеides and Hermippos pelt
Their Perikles and Kumon? standing forth,
Bareheaded, not safe crouched behind a name,—
Philonides or else Kallistratos,
Put forth, when danger threatened,—mask for face,
To bear the brunt,—if blame fell, take the blame,—
If praise . . . why, frank laughed Aristophanes
"They write such rare stuff? No, I promise you!"
Rather, I see all true improvements, made
Or making, go against you—tooth and nail
Contended with; 't is still Moruchides,
'T is Euthumenes, Surakosios, nay,
Argurrhios and Kinesias,—common sense
And public shame, these only cleanse your stye!
Coerced, prohibited,—you grin and bear,
And, soon as may be, hug to heart again
The banished nastiness too dear to drop!
Krates could teach and practise festive song
Yet scorn scurrility; as gay and good,

Pherekrates could follow. *Who* loosed hold,
Must let fall rose-wreath, stoop to muck once more?
Did your particular self advance in aught,
Task the sad genius—steady slave the while—
To further—say, the patriotic aim?
No, there 's deterioration manifest
Year by year, play by play! survey them all,
From that boy's-triumph when "Acharnes" dawned,
To "Thesmophoriazousai,"—this man's-shame!
There, truly, patriot zeal so prominent
Allowed friends' plea perhaps: the baser stuff
Was but the nobler spirit's vehicle.
Who would imprison, unvolatilize
A violet's perfume, blends with fatty oils
Essence too fugitive in flower alone;
So, calling unguent—violet, call the play—
Obscenity impregnated with "Peace"!
But here 's the boy grown bald, and here 's the play
With twenty years' experience: where 's one spice
Of odour in the hog's-lard? what pretends
To aught except a grease-pot's quality?
Friend, sophist-hating! know,—worst sophistry
Is when man's own soul plays its own self false,
Reasons a vice into a virtue, pleads
"I detail sin to shame its author"—not
"I shame Ariphrades for sin's display"!

"I show Opora to commend Sweet Home"—
Not "I show Bacchis for the striplings' sake!"

Yet all the same—O genius and O gold—
Had genius ne'er diverted gold from use
Worthy the temple, to do copper's work
And coat a swine's trough—which abundantly
Might furnish Phoibos' tripod, Pallas' throne!
Had you, I dream, discarding all the base,
The brutish, spurned alone convention's watch
And ward against invading decency
Disguised as license, law in lawlessness,
And so, re-ordinating outworn rule,
Made Comedy and Tragedy combine,
Prove some new Both-yet-neither, all one bard,
Euripides with Aristophanes
Coöperant! this, reproducing Now
As that gave Then existence: Life to-day,
This, as that other—Life dead long ago!
The mob decrees such feat no crown, perchance,
But—why call crowning the reward of quest?
Tell him, my other poet,—where thou walk'st
Some rarer world than e'er Ilissos washed!

But dream goes idly in the air. To earth!
Earth's question just amounts to—which succeeds,

Which fails of two life-long antagonists?
Suppose my charges all mistake! assume
Your end, despite ambiguous means, the best—
The only! you and he, a patriot-pair,
Have striven alike for one result—say, Peace!
You spoke your best straight to the arbiters—
Our people: have you made them end this war
By dint of laughter and abuse and lies
And postures of Opora? Sadly—No!
This war, despite your twenty-five years' work,
May yet endure until Athenai falls,
And freedom falls with her. So much for you!
Now, the antagonist Euripides—
Has he succeeded better? Who shall say?
He spoke quite o'er the heads of Kleon's crowd
To a dim future, and if there he fail,
Why, you are fellows in adversity.
But that 's unlike the fate of wise words launched
By music on their voyage. Hail, Depart,
Arrive, Glad Welcome! Not my single wish—
Yours also wafts the white sail on its way,
Your nature too is kingly. All beside
I call pretension—no true potentate,
Whatever intermediary be crowned,
Zeus or Poseidon, where the vulgar sky

Lacks not Triballos to complete the group.
I recognize,—behind such phantom-crew,—
Necessity, Creation, Poet's Power,
Else never had I dared approach, appeal
To poetry, power, Aristophanes!
But I trust truth's inherent kingliness,
Trust who, by reason of much truth, shall reign
More or less royally—may prayer but push
His sway past limit, purge the false from true!
Nor, even so, had boldness nerved my tongue
But that the other king stands suddenly,
In all the grand investiture of death,
Bowing your knee beside my lowly head—
Equals one moment!

Now, arise and go!
Both have done homage to Euripides!

Silence pursued the words: till he broke out—

"Scarce so! This constitutes, I may believe,
Sufficient homage done by who defames
Your poet's foe, since you account me such;
But homage-proper,—pay it by defence
Of him, direct defence and not oblique,
Not by mere mild admonishment of me!

Defence? The best, the only! I replied.
A story goes—When Sophokles, last year,
Cited before tribunal by his son
(A poet—to complete the parallel)
Was certified unsound of intellect,
And claimed as only fit for tutelage,
Since old and doating and incompetent
To carry on this world's work,—the defence
Consisted just in his reciting (calm
As the verse bore, which sets our heart a-swell
And voice a-heaving too tempestuously)
That choros-chant "The station of the steed,
Stranger! thou comest to,—Kolonos white!"
Then he looked round and all revolt was dead.
You know the one adventure of my life—
What made Euripides Balaustion's friend.
When I last saw him, as he bade farewell,
"I sang another 'Herakles,'" smiled he;
"It gained no prize: your love be prize I gain!
Take it—the tablets also where I traced
The story first with stulos pendent still—
Nay, the psalterion may complete the gift,
So, should you croon the ode bewailing Age,
Yourself shall modulate—same notes, same strings—
With the old friend who loved Balaustion once."
There they lie! When you broke our solitude,

We were about to honour him once more
By reading the consummate Tragedy.
Night is advanced; I have small mind to sleep;
May I go on, and read,—so make defence,
So test true godship? You affirm, not I,
—Beating the god, affords such test: *I* hold
That when rash hands but touch divinity,
The chains drop off, the prison-walls dispart,
And—fire—he fronts mad Pentheus! Dare we try?

Accordingly I read the perfect piece.

HERAKLES.

AMPHITRUON.

Zeus' Couchmate,—who of mortals knows not me,
Argive Amphitruon whom Alkaios sired
Of old, as Perseus him, I—Herakles?
My home, this Thebai where the earth-born spike
Of Sown-ones burgeoned: Ares saved from these
A handful of their seed that stocks to-day
With children's children Thebai, Kadmos built.
Of these had Kreon birth, Menoikeus' child,
King of the country,—Kreon that became
The father of this woman, Megara,
Whom, when time was, Kadmeians one and all
Pealed praise to, marriage-songs with fluted help,
While to my dwelling that grand Herakles
Bore her, his bride. But, leaving Thebes—where I
Abode perforce—this Megara and those

Her kinsmen, the desire possessed my son
Rather to dwell in Argos, that walled work,
Kuklopian city, which I fly, myself,
Because I slew Elektruon. Seeking so
To ease away my hardships and once more
Inhabit his own land, for my return
Heavy the price he pays Eurustheus there—
The letting in of light on this choked world!
Either he promised, vanquished by the goad
Of Heré, or because fate willed it thus.
The other labours—why, he toiled them through;
But for this last one—down by Tainaros,
Its mouth, to Haides' realm descended he
To drag into the light the three-shaped hound
Of Hell: whence Herakles returns no more.
Now, there 's an old-world tale, Kadmeians have,
How Dirké's husband was a Lukos once,
Holding the seven-towered city here in sway
Before they ruled the land, white-steeded pair,
The twins Amphion, Zethos, born to Zeus.
This Lukos' son,—named like his father too,
No born Kadmeian but Euboia's gift,—
Comes and kills Kreon, lords it o'er the land,
Falling upon our town sedition-sick.
To us, akin to Kreon, just that bond
Becomes the worst of evils, seemingly;

For, since my son is in the earth's abysms,
This man of valour, Lukos, lord and king,
Seeks now to slay these sons of Herakles,
And slay his wife as well,—by murder thus
Thinking to stamp out murder,—slay too me,
(If me 't is fit you count among men still,—
Useless old age) and all for fear lest these,
Grown men one day, exact due punishment
Of bloodshed and their mother's father's fate.
I therefore, since he leaves me in these domes,
The children's household guardian,—left, when earth's
Dark dread he underwent, that son of mine,—
I, with their mother, lest his boys should die,
Sit at this altar of the saviour Zeus
Which, glory of triumphant spear, he raised
Conquering—my nobly-born!—the Minuai.
Here do we guard our station, destitute
Of all things, drink, food, raiment, on bare ground
Couched side by side: sealed out of house and home
Sit we in a resourcelessness of help.
Our friends—why, some are no true friends, I see!
The rest, that are true, want the means to aid.
So operates in man adversity:
Whereof may never anybody—no,
Though half of him should really wish me well,—
Happen to taste! a friend-test faultless, that!

MEGARA

Old man, who erst didst raze the Taphian town,
Illustriously, the army-leader, thou,
Of speared Kadmeians—how gods play men false!
I, now, missed nowise fortune in my sire,
Who, for his wealth, was boasted mighty once,
Having supreme rule,—for the love of which
Leap the long lances forth at favoured breasts,—
And having children too: and me he gave
Thy son, his house with that of Herakles
Uniting by the far-famed marriage-bed.
And now these things are dead and flown away,
While thou and I await our death, old man,
These Herakleian boys too, whom—my chicks—
I save beneath my wings like brooding bird.
But one or other falls to questioning
"O mother," cries he, "where in all the world
Is father gone to? What 's he doing? when
Will he come back?" At fault through tender years,
They seek their sire. For me, I put them off,
Telling them stories; at each creak of doors,
All wonder "Does he come?"—and all a-foot
Make for the fall before the parent knee.
Now then, what hope, what method of escape
Facilitatest thou?—for, thee, old man,

I look to,—since we may not leave by stealth
The limits of the land, and guards, more strong
Than we, are at the outlets: nor in friends
Remain to us the hopes of safety more.
Therefore, whatever thy decision be,
Impart it for the common good of all!
Lest now should prove the proper time to die,
Though, being weak, we spin it out and live.

AMPHITRUON.

Daughter, it scarce is easy, do one's best,
To blurt out counsel, things at such a pass.

MEGARA.

You want some sorrow more, or so love life?

AMPHITRUON.

I both enjoy life, and love hopes beside.

MEGARA.

And I; but hope against hope—no, old man!

AMPHITRUON.

In these delayings of an ill lurks cure.

MEGARA.

But bitter is the meantime, and it bites.

AMPHITRUON.

O there may be a run before the wind
From out these present ills, for me and thee,
Daughter, and yet may come my son, thy spouse!
But hush! and from the children take away
Their founts a-flow with tears, and talk them calm
Steal them by stories—sad theft, all the same!
For, human troubles—they grow weary too;
Neither the wind-blasts always have their strength
Nor happy men keep happy to the end:
Since all things change—their natures part in twain;
And that man 's bravest, therefore, who hopes on,
Hopes ever: to despair is coward-like.

CHOROS.

These domes that overroof,
This long-used couch, I come to, having made
A staff my prop, that song may put to proof
The swan-like power, age-whitened,—poet's aid
Of sobbed-forth dirges—words that stand aloof
From action now: such am I--just a shade

With night for all its face, a mere night-dream—
And words that tremble too: howe'er they seem,
Devoted words, I deem.

O, of a father ye unfathered ones,
O thou old man, and thou whose groaning stuns—
Unhappy mother—only us above,
Nor reaches him below in Haides' realm, thy love!
—(Faint not too soon, urge forward foot and limb
Way-weary, nor lose courage—as some horse
Yoked to the car whose weight recoils on him
Just at the rock-ridge that concludes his course!
Take by the hand, the peplos, anyone
Whose foothold fails him, printless and fordone!
Aged, assist along me aged too,
Who,—mate with thee in toils when life was new,
And shields and spears first made acquaintanceship,—
Stood by thyself and proved no bastard-slip
Of fatherland when loftiest glory grew.)—
See now, how like the sire's
Each eyeball fiercely fires!
What though ill-fortune have not left his race?
Neither is gone the grand paternal grace!
Hellas! O what—what combatants, destroyed
In these, wilt thou one day seek—seek, and find all
void!

Pause! for I see the ruler of this land,
Lukos, now passing through the palace-gate.

LUKOS.

The Herakleian couple—father, wife—
If needs I must, I question: "must" forsooth?
Being your master—all I please, I ask.
To what time do you seek to spin out life?
What hope, what help see, so as not to die?
Is it you trust the sire of these, that 's sunk
In Haides, will return? How past the pitch,
Suppose you have to die, you pile the woe—
Thou, casting, Hellas through, thy empty vaunts
As though Zeus helped thee to a god for son;
And thou, that thou wast styled our best man's wife!
Where was the awful in his work wound up,
If he did quell and quench the marshy snake
Or the Nemeian monster whom he snared
And—says, by throttlings of his arm, he slew?
With these do you outwrestle me? Such feats
Shall save from death the sons of Herakles
Who got praise, being nought, for bravery
In wild-beast-battle, otherwise a blank?
No man to throw on left arm buckler's weight,
Not he, nor get in spear's reach! bow he bore—

True coward's-weapon: shoot first and then fly!
No bow-and-arrow proves a man is brave,
But who keeps rank,—stands, one unwinking stare
As, ploughing up, the darts come,—brave is he.
My action has no impudence, old man!
Providence, rather: for I own I slew
Kreon, this woman's sire, and have his seat.
Nowise I wish, then, to leave, these grown up,
Avengers on me, payment for my deeds.

AMPHITRUON.

As to the part of Zeus in his own child,
Let Zeus defend that! As to mine, 't is me
The care concerns to show by argument
The folly of this fellow,—Herakles,
Whom I stand up for! since to hear thee styled—
Cowardly—that is unendurable.
First then, the infamous (for I account
Amongst the words denied to human speech,
Timidity ascribed thee, Herakles!)
This I must put from thee, with gods in proof.
Zeus' thunder I appeal to, those four steeds
Whereof he also was the charioteer
When, having shot down the earth's Giant-growth—
(Never shaft flew but found and fitted flank)

Triumph he sang in common with the gods.
The Kentaur-race, four footed insolence—
Go ask at Pholoé, vilest thou of kings,
Whom they would pick out and pronounce best man,
If not my son, "the seeming-brave," say'st thou!
But Dirphus, thy Abantid mother-town,
Question her, and she would not praise, I think!
For there 's no spot, where having done some good,
Thy country thou mightst call to witness worth.
Now, that all-wise invention, archer's-gear,
Thou blamest: hear my teaching and grow sage!
A man in armour is his armour's slave,
And, mixed with rank and file that want to run,
He dies because his neighbours have lost heart.
Then, should he break his spear, no way remains
Of warding death off,—gone that body-guard,
His one and only; while, whatever folk
Have the true bow-hand,—here 's the one main good,—
Though he have sent ten thousand shafts abroad,
Others remain wherewith the archer saves
His limbs and life, too,—stands afar and wards
Away from flesh the foe that vainly stares
Hurt by the viewless arrow, while himself
Offers no full front to those opposite,
But keeps in thorough cover: there 's the point
That 's capital in combat—damage foe,

Yet keep a safe skin—foe not out of reach
As you are! Thus my words contrast with thine,
And such, in judging facts, our difference.
These children, now, why dost thou seek to slay?
What have they done thee? In a single point
I count thee wise—if, being base thyself,
Thou dread'st the progeny of nobleness.
Yet this bears hard upon us, all the same,
If we must die—because of fear in thee—
A death 't were fit thou suffer at our hands,
Thy betters, did Zeus rightly judge us all.
If therefore thou art bent on sceptre-sway,
Thyself, here—suffer us to leave the land,
Fugitives! nothing do by violence,
Or violence thyself shalt undergo
When the gods' gale may chance to change for thee!
Alas, O land of Kadmos,—for 't is thee
I mean to close with, dealing out the due
Revilement,—in such sort dost thou defend
Herakles and his children? Herakles
Who, coming, one to all the world, against
The Minuai, fought them and left Thebes an eye
Unblinded henceforth to front freedom with!
Neither do I praise Hellas, nor shall brook
Ever to keep in silence that I count
Towards my son, craven of cravens—her

Whom it behoved go bring the young ones here
Fire, spears, arms—in exchange for seas made safe,
And cleansings of the land—his labour's price.
But fire, spears, arms,—O children, neither Thebes
Nor Hellas has them for you! 'T is myself,
A feeble friend, ye look to: nothing now
But a tongue's murmur, for the strength is gone
We had once, and with age are limbs a-shake
And force a-flicker! Were I only young,
Still with the mastery o'er bone and thew,
Grasping first spear that came, the yellow locks
Of this insulter would I bloody so—
Should send him skipping o'er the Atlantic bounds
Out of my arm's reach through poltroonery!

CHOROS.

Have not the really good folk starting-points
For speech to purpose,—though rare talkers they?

LUKOS.

Say thou against us words thou towerest with!
I, for thy words, will deal thee blows, their due.
Go, some to Helikon, to Parnasos
Some, and the clefts there! Bid the woodmen fell

Oak-trunks, and, when the same are brought inside
The city, pile the altar round with logs,
Then fire it, burn the bodies of them all,
That they may learn thereby, no dead man rules
The land here, but 't is I, by acts like these!
As for you, old sirs, who are set against
My judgments, you shall groan for—not alone
The Herakleian children, but the fate
Of your own house beside, when faring ill
By any chance: and you shall recollect
Slaves are you of a tyranny that 's mine!

CHOROS.

O progeny of earth,—whom Ares sowed
When he laid waste the dragon's greedy jaw—
Will ye not lift the staves, right-hand supports,
And bloody this man's irreligious head?
Who, being no Kadmeian, rules,—the wretch,—
Our easy youth: an interloper too!
But not of me, at least, shalt thou enjoy
Thy lordship ever; nor my labour's fruit,—
Hand worked so hard for,—have! A curse with thee,
Whence thou didst come, there go and tyrannize!
For never while I live shalt thou destroy
The Herakleian children: not so deep

Hides he below ground, leaving thee their lord!
But we bear both of you in mind,—that thou,
The land's destroyer, dost possess the land,
While he who saved it, loses every right.
I play the busybody—for I serve
My dead friends when they need friends' service most?
O right-hand, how thou yearnest to snatch spear
And serve indeed! in weakness dies the wish,
Or I had stayed thee calling me a slave,
And nobly drawn my breath at home in Thebes
Where thou exultest!—city that 's insane,
Sick through sedition and bad government,
Else never had she gained for master—thee!

MEGARA.

Old friends, I praise you: since a righteous wrath
For friend's sake well becomes a friend. But no!
On our account in anger with your lord,
Suffer no injury! Hear my advice,
Amphitruon, if I seem to speak aright.
O yes, I love my children! how not love
What I brought forth, what toiled for? and to die—
Sad I esteem too; still, the fated way
Who stiffens him against, that man I count
Poor creature; us, who are of other mood,

Since we must die, behoves us meet our death
Not burnt to cinders, giving foes the laugh—
To me, worse ill than dying, that! We owe
Our houses many a brave deed, now to pay.
Thee, indeed, gloriously men estimate
For spear-work, so that unendurable
Were it that thou shouldst die a death of shame.
And for my glorious husband, where wants he
A witness that he would not save his boys
If touched in their good fame thereby? Since birth
Bears ill with baseness done for children's sake,
My husband needs must be my pattern here.
See now thy hope—how much I count thereon!
Thou thinkest that thy son will come to light:
And, of the dead, who came from Haides back?
But we with talk this man might mollify:
Never! Of all foes, fly the foolish one!
Wise, well-bred people, make concession to!
Sooner you meet respect by speaking soft.
Already it was in my mind—perchance
We might beg off these children's banishment;
But even that is sad, involving them
In safety, ay—and piteous poverty!
Since the host's visage for the flying friend
Has, only one day, the sweet look, 't is said.
Dare with us death, which waits thee, dared or no!

We call on thine ancestral worth, old man!
For who outlabours what the gods appoint
Shows energy, but energy gone mad.
Since what must—none e'er makes what must not be.

CHOROS.

Had anyone, while yet my arms were strong,
Been scorning thee, he easily had ceased.
But we are nought, now; thine henceforth to see—
Amphitruon, how to push aside these fates!

AMPHITRUON.

Nor cowardice nor a desire of life
Stops me from dying: but I seek to save
My son his children. Vain! I set my heart,
It seems, upon impossibility.
See, it is ready for the sword, this throat
To pierce, divide, dash down from precipice!
But one grace grant us, king, we supplicate!
Slay me and this unhappy one before
The children, lest we see them—impious sight!—
Gasping the soul forth, calling all the while
On mother and on father's father! Else,
Do as thy heart inclines thee! No resource
Have we from death, and we resign ourselves.

MEGARA.

And I too supplicate: add grace to grace,
And, though but one man, doubly serve us both!
Let me bestow adornment of the dead
Upon these children! Throw the palace wide!
For now we are shut out. Thence these shall share
At least so much of wealth was once their sire's!

LUKOS.

These things shall be. Withdraw the bolts, I bid
My servants! Enter and adorn yourselves!
I grudge no peploi; but when these ye wind
About your bodies,—that adornment done,—
Then I shall come and give you to the grave.

MEGARA.

O children, follow this unhappy foot,
Your mother's, into your ancestral home,
Where others have the power, are lords in truth,
Although the empty name is left us yet!

AMPHITRUON.

O Zeus, in vain I had thee marriage-mate,
In vain I called thee father of my child!

Thou wast less friendly far than thou didst seem.
I, the mere man, o'ermatch in virtue thee
The mighty god: for I have not betrayed
The Herakleian children,—whereas thou
Hadst wit enough to come clandestinely
Into the chamber, take what no man gave,
Another's place; and when it comes to help
Thy loved ones, there thou lackest wit indeed!
Thou art some stupid god or born unjust.

CHOROS.

Even a dirge, can Phoibos suit
In song to music jubilant
For all its sorrow: making shoot
His golden plectron o'er the lute,
Melodious ministrant.
And I, too, am of mind to raise,
Despite the imminence of doom,
A song of joy, outpour my praise
To him—what is it rumour says?—
Whether—now buried in the ghostly gloom
Below ground,—he was child of Zeus indeed,
Or mere Amphitruon's mortal seed—
To him I weave the wreath of song, his labour's meed.
For, is my hero perished in the feat?

The virtues of brave toils, in death complete,
These save the dead in song,—their glory-garland meet!

First, then, he made the wood
Of Zeus a solitude,
Slaying its lion-tenant; and he spread
The tawniness behind—his yellow head
Enmuffled by the brute's, backed by that grin of dread.
The mountain-roving savage Kentaur-race
He strewed with deadly bow about their place,
Slaying with winged shafts: Peneios knew,
Beauteously-eddying, and the long tracts too
Of pasture trampled fruitless, and as well
Those desolated haunts Mount Pelion under,
And, grassy up to Homolé, each dell
Whence, having filled their hands with pine-tree plunder,
Horse-like was wont to prance from, and subdue
The land of Thessaly, that bestial crew.
The golden-headed spot-back'd stag he slew,
That robber of the rustics: glorified
Therewith the goddess who in hunter's pride
Slaughters the game along Oinoé's side.
And, yoked abreast, he brought the chariot-breed
To pace submissive to the bit, each steed
That in the bloody cribs of Diomede
Champed and, unbridled, hurried down that gore

For grain, exultant the dread feast before—
Of man's flesh: hideous feeders they of yore!
All as he crossed the Hebros' silver-flow
Accomplished he such labour, toiling so
For Mukenaian tyrant; ay, and more—
He crossed the Melian shore
And, by the sources of Amauros, shot
To death that strangers'-pest
Kuknos, who dwelt in Amphanaia: not
Of fame for good to guest!

And next, to the melodious maids he came,
Inside the Hesperian court-yard: hand must aim
At plucking gold fruit from the appled leaves,
Now he had killed the dragon, backed like flame,
Who guards the unapproachable he weaves
Himself all round, one spire about the same.
And into those sea-troughs of ocean dived
The hero, and for mortals calm contrived,
Whatever oars should follow in his wake.
And under heaven's mid-seat his hands thrust he,
At home with Atlas: and, for valour's sake,
Held the gods up their star-faced mansionry.
Also, the rider-host of Amazons
About Maiotis many-streamed, he went
To conquer through the billowy Euxin once,

Having collected what an armament
Of friends from Hellas, all on conquest bent
Of that gold-garnished cloak, dread girdle-chase!
So Hellas gained the girl's barbarian grace
And at Mukenai saves the trophy still—
Go wonder there, who will!

And the ten thousand-headed hound
Of many a murder, the Lernaian snake
He burned out, head by head, and cast around
His darts a poison thence,—darts soon to slake
Their rage in that three-bodied herdsman's gore
Of Erutheia. Many a running more
He made for triumph and felicity,
And, last of toils, to Haides, never dry
Of tears, he sailed: and there he, luckless, ends
His life completely, nor returns again.
The house and home are desolate of friends,
And where the children's life-path leads them, plain
I see,—no step retraceable, no god
Availing, and no law to help the lost!
The oar of Charon marks their period,
Waits to end all. Thy hands, these roofs accost!—
To thee, though absent, look their uttermost!

But if in youth and strength I flourished still,

Still shook the spear in fight, did power match will
In these Kadmeian co-mates of my age,
They would,—and I,—when warfare was to wage,
Stand by these children; but I am bereft
Of youth now, lone of that good genius left!

But hist, desist! for here come these,—
Draped as the dead go, under and over,—
Children long since,—now hard to discover,—
Of the once so potent Herakles!
And the loved wife dragging, in one tether
About her feet, the boys together;
And the hero's aged sire comes last!
Unhappy that I am! Of tears which rise,—
How am I all unable to hold fast,
Longer, the aged fountains of these eyes!

MEGARA.

Be it so! Who is priest, who butcher here
Of these ill-fated ones, or stops the breath
Of me, the miserable? Ready, see,
The sacrifice—to lead where Haides lives!
O children, we are led—no lovely team
Of corpses—age, youth, motherhood, all mixed!

O sad fate of myself and these my sons
Whom with these eyes I look at, this last time!
I, indeed, bore you: but for enemies
I brought you up to be a laughing-stock,
Matter for merriment, destruction-stuff!
Woe 's me!
Strangely indeed my hopes have struck me down
From what I used to hope about you once—
The expectation from your father's talk!
For thee, now, thy dead sire dealt Argos to:
Thou wast to have Eurustheus' house one day,
And rule Pelasgia where the fine fruits grow;
And, for a stole of state, he wrapped about
Thy head with that the lion-monster bore,
That which himself went wearing armour-wise.
And thou wast King of Thebes—such chariots there!
Those plains I had for portion—all for thee,
As thou hadst coaxed them out of who gave birth
To thee, his boy: and into thy right hand
He thrust the guardian-club of Daidalos,—
Poor guardian proves the gift that plays thee false!
And upon thee he promised to bestow
Oichalia—what, with those far-shooting shafts,
He ravaged once; and so, since three you were,
With threefold kingdoms did he build you up

To very towers, your father,—proud enough
Prognosticating, from your manliness
In boyhood, what the manhood's self would be.
For my part, I was picking out for you
Brides, suiting each with his alliance—this
From Athens, this from Sparté, this from Thebes—
Whence, suited—as stern-cables steady ship—
You might have hold on life gods bless. All gone!
Fortune turns round and gives us—you, the Fates
Instead of brides—me, tears for nuptial baths,
Unhappy in my hoping! And the sire
Of your sire—he prepares the marriage-feast
Befitting Haides who plays father now—
Bitter relationship! Oh me! which first—
Which last of you shall I to bosom fold?
To whom shall I fit close, his mouth to mine?
Of whom shall I lay hold and ne'er let go?
How would I gather, like the brown-winged bee,
The groans from all, and, gathered into one,
Give them you back again, a crowded tear!
Dearest, if any voice be heard of men
Dungeoned in Haides, thee—to thee I speak!
Here is thy father dying, and thy boys!
And I too perish, famed as fortunate
By mortals once, through thee! Assist them!
Come!

But come! though just a shade, appear to me!
For, coming, thy ghost-grandeur would suffice,
Such cowards are they in thy presence, these
Who kill thy children now thy back is turned!

AMPHITRUON.

Ay, daughter, bid the powers below assist!
But I will rather, raising hand to heaven,
Call thee to help, O Zeus, if thy intent
Be, to these children, helpful anyway,
Since soon thou wilt be valueless enough!
And yet thou hast been called and called; in vain
I labour: for we needs must die, it seems.
Well, aged brothers—life 's a little thing!
Such as it is, then, pass life pleasantly
From day to night, nor once grieve all the while!
Since Time concerns him not about our hopes,—
To save them,—but his own work done, flies off.
Witness myself, looked up to among men,
Doing noteworthy deeds: when here comes fate
Lifts me away, like feather skyward borne,
In one day! Riches then and glory,—whom
These are found constant to, I know not. Friends
Farewell! the man who loved you all so much,
Now, this last time, my mates, ye look upon!

MEGARA.

Ha!
O father, do I see my dearest? Speak!

AMPHITRUON.

No more than thou canst, daughter—dumb like thee!

MEGARA.

Is this he whom we heard was under ground?

AMPHITRUON.

Unless at least some dream in day we see!

MEGARA.

What do I say? what dreams insanely view?
This is no other than thy son, old sire!
Here children! hang to these paternal robes,
Quick, haste, hold hard on him, since here 's your true
Zeus that can save—and every whit as well!

HERAKLES.

O hail, my palace, my hearth's propula,—
How glad I see thee as I come to light!

Ha, what means this? My children I behold
Before the house in garments of the grave,
Chapleted, and, amid a crowd of men,
My very wife—my father weeping too,
Whatever the misfortune! Come, best take
My station nearer these and learn it all!
Wife, what new sorrow has approached our home?

MEGARA.

O dearest! light flashed on thy father now!
Art thou come? art thou saved and dost thou fall
On friends in their supreme extremity?

HERAKLES.

How say'st thou? Father! what 's the trouble here?

MEGARA.

Undone are we!—but thou, old man, forgive
If first I snatch what thou shouldst say to him!
For somehow womanhood wakes pity more.
Here are my children killed and I undone!

HERAKLES.

Apollon, with what preludes speech begins!

MEGARA.

Dead are my brothers and old father too.

HERAKLES.

How say'st thou?—doing what?—by spear-stroke whence?

MEGARA.

Lukos destroyed them—the land's noble king!

HERAKLES.

Met them in arms? or through the land's disease?

MEGARA.

Sedition: and he sways seven-gated Thebes.

HERAKLES.

Why then came fear on the old man and thee?

MEGARA.

He meant to kill thy father, me, our boys.

HERAKLES.

How say'st thou? Fearing what from orphanage?

MEGARA.

Lest they should some day pay back Kreon's death

HERAKLES.

And why trick out the boys corpse-fashion thus?

MEGARA.

These wraps of death we have already donned.

HERAKLES.

And you had died through violence? Woe 's me!

MEGARA.

Left bare of friends: and thou wast dead, we heard.

HERAKLES.

And whence came on you this faintheartedness?

MEGARA.

The heralds of Eurustheus brought the news.

HERAKLES.

And why was it you left my house and hearth?

MEGARA.

Forced thence; thy father—from his very couch!

HERAKLES.

And no shame at insulting the old man?

MEGARA.

Shame, truly! no near neighbours *he* and Shame!

HERAKLES.

And so much, in my absence, lacked I friends?

MEGARA.

Friends,—are there any to a luckless man?

HERAKLES.

The Minuai-war I waged,—they spat forth these?

MEGARA.

Friendless,—again I tell thee,—is ill-luck.

HERAKLES.

Will not you cast these hell-wraps from your hair

And look on light again, and with your eyes
Taste the sweet change from nether dark to
day?
While I—for now there needs my handiwork—
First I shall go, demolish the abodes
Of these new lordships; next hew off the head
Accurst and toss it for the dogs to trail.
Then, such of the Kadmeians as I find
Were craven though they owed me gratitude,—
Some I intend to handle with this club
Renowned for conquest; and with winged shafts
Scatter the others, fill Ismenos full
With bloody corpses,—Dirké's flow so white
Shall be incarnadined. For, whom, I pray,
Behoves me rather help than wife and child
And aged father? Farewell, "Labours" mine!
Vainly I wrought them: my true work lay here!
My business is to die defending these,—
If for their father's sake they meant to die.
Or how shall we call brave the battling it
With snake and lion, as Eurustheus bade,
If yet I must not labour death away
From my own children? "Conquering Herakles"
Folk will not call me as they used, I think!
The right thing is for parents to assist
Children, old age, the partner of the couch.

AMPHITRUON.

True, son! thy duty is—be friend to friends
And foe to foes: yet—no more haste than needs!

HERAKLES.

Why, father, what is over hasty here?

AMPHITRUON.

Many a pauper,—seeming to be rich,
As the word goes,—the king calls partisan.
Such made a riot, ruined Thebes to rob
Their neighbour: for, what good they had at home
Was spent and gone—flew off through idleness.
You came to trouble Thebes, they saw: since seen,
Beware lest, raising foes, a multitude,
You stumble where you apprehend no harm.

HERAKLES.

If all Thebes saw me, not a whit care I.
But seeing as I did a certain bird
Not in the lucky seats, I knew some woe
Was fallen upon the house: so, purposely,
By stealth I made my way into the land.

AMPHITRUON.

And now, advancing, hail the hearth with praise
And give the ancestral home thine eye to see!
For he himself will come, thy wife and sons
To drag-forth—slaughter—slay me too,—this king!
But, here remaining, all succeeds with thee—
Gain lost by no false step. So, this thy town
Disturb not, son, ere thou right matters here!

HERAKLES.

Thus will I do, for thou say'st well; my home
Let me first enter! Since at the due time
Returning from the unsunned depths where dwells
Haides' wife Koré, let me not affront
Those gods beneath my roof I first should hail!

AMPHITRUON.

For didst thou really visit Haides, son?

HERAKLES.

Ay—dragged to light, too, his three-headed beast.

AMPHITRUON.

By fight didst conquer, or through Koré's gift?

HERAKLES.

Fight: well for me, I saw the Orgies first!

AMPHITRUON.

And is he in Eurustheus' house, the brute?

HERAKLES.

Chthonia's grove, Hermion's city, hold him now.

AMPHITRUON.

Does not Eurustheus know thee back on earth?

HERAKLES.

No: I would come first and see matters here.

AMPHITRUON.

But how wast thou below ground such a time?

HERAKLES.

I stopped, from Haides, bringing Theseus up.

AMPHITRUON.

And where is he?—bound o'er the plain for home?

HERAKLES.

Gone glad to Athens—Haides' fugitive!
But, up, boys! follow father into house!
There's a far better going-in for you
Truly, than going-out was! Nay, take heart,
And let the eyes no longer run and run!
And thou, O wife, my own, collect thy soul
Nor tremble now! Leave grasping, all of you,
My garments! I'm not winged, nor fly from friends!
Ah,—
No letting go for these, who all the more
Hang to my garments! Did you foot indeed
The razor's edge? Why, then I'll carry them—
Take with my hands these small craft up, and tow
Just as a ship would. There! don't fear I shirk
My children's service! this way, men are men,
No difference! best and worst, they love their boys
After one fashion: wealth they differ in—
Some have it, others not; but each and all
Combine to form the children-loving race.

CHOROS.

Youth is a pleasant burthen to me;
But age on my head, more heavily

Than the crags of Aitna, weighs and weighs,
And darkening cloaks the lids and intercepts the rays.
Never be mine the preference
Of an Asian empire's wealth, nor yet
Of a house all gold, to youth, to youth
That 's beauty, whatever the gods dispense!
Whether in wealth we joy, or fret
Paupers,—of all God's gifts most beautiful, in truth!

But miserable murderous age I hate!
Let it go to wreck, the waves adown,
Nor ever by rights plague tower or town
Where mortals bide, but still elate
With wings, on ether, precipitate,
Wander them round—nor wait!

But if the gods, to man's degree,
Had wit and wisdom, they would bring
Mankind a twofold youth, to be
Their virtue's sign-mark, all should see,
In those with whom life's winter thus grew spring.
For when they died, into the sun once more
Would they have traversed twice life's racecourse o'er;
While ignobility had simply run

Existence through, nor second life begun.
And so might we discern both bad and good
As surely as the starry multitude
Is numbered by the sailors, one and one.
But now the gods by no apparent line
Limit the worthy and the base define;
Only, a certain period rounds, and so
Brings man more wealth,—but youthful vigour, no!

Well! I am not to pause
Mingling together—wine and wine in cup—
The Graces with the Muses up—
Most dulcet marriage: loosed from music's laws,
No life for me!
But where the wreaths abound, there ever may I be!
And still, an aged bard, I shout Mnemosuné—
Still chant of Herakles the triumph-chant,
Companioned by the seven-stringed tortoise-shell
And Libuan flute, and Bromios' self as well,
God of the grape, with man participant!
Not yet will we arrest their glad advance—
The Muses who so long have led me forth to dance!
A paian—hymn the Delian girls indeed,
Weaving a beauteous measure in and out
His temple-gates, Latona's goodly seed;
And paians—I too, these thy domes about,

From these grey cheeks, my king, will swan-like shout—
Old songster! Ay, in song it starts off brave—
"Zeus' son is he!" and yet, such grace of birth
Surpassing far, to man his labours gave
Existence, one calm flow without a wave,
Having destroyed the beasts, the terrors of the earth.

LUKOS.

From out the house Amphitruon comes—in time!
For 't is a long while now since ye bedecked
Your bodies with the dead-folk's finery.
But quick! the boys and wife of Herakles—
Bid them appear outside this house, keep pact
To die, and need no bidding but your own!

AMPHITRUON.

King! you press hard on me sore-pressed enough,
And give me scorn—beside my dead ones here.
Meet in such matters were it, though you reign,
To temper zeal with moderation. Since
You do impose on us the need to die—
Needs must we love our lot, obey your will.

LUKOS.

Where 's Megara, then? Alkmené's grandsons, where?

AMPHITRUON.

She, I think,—as one figures from outside,—

LUKOS.

Well, this same thinking,—what affords its ground?

AMPHITRUON.

—Sits suppliant on the holy altar-steps,—

LUKOS.

Idly indeed a suppliant to save life!

AMPHITRUON.

—And calls on her dead husband, vainly too!

LUKOS.

For he 's not come, nor ever will arrive.

AMPHITRUON.

Never—at least, if no god raise him up.

LUKOS.

Go to her, and conduct her from the house!

AMPHITRUON.

I should partake the murder, doing that.

LUKOS.

We,—since thou hast a scruple in the case,—
Outside of fears, we shall march forth these lads
Mother and all. Here, follow me, my folk—
And gladly so remove what stops our toils!

AMPHITRUON.

Thou—go then! March where needs must! What remains—
Perhaps concerns another. Doing ill,
Expect some ill be done thee!
Ha, old friends!
On he strides beautifully! in the toils
O' the net, where swords spring forth, will he be fast—
Minded to kill his neighbours—the arch-knave!
I go, too—I must see the falling corpse!
For he has sweets to give—a dying man,
Your foe, that pays the price of deeds he did.

CHOROS.

Troubles are over! He the great king once
Turns the point, tends for Haides, goal of life!
O justice, and the gods' back-flowing fate!

AMPHITRUON.

Thou art come, late indeed, where death pays crime—
These insults heaped on better than thyself!

CHOROS.

Joy gives this outburst to my tears! Again
Come round those deeds, his doing, which of old
He never dreamed himself was to endure—
King of the country! But enough, old man!
Indoors, now, let us see how matters stand—
If somebody be faring as I wish!

LUKOS.

Ah me—me!

CHOROS.

This strikes the keynote—music to my mind,
Merry i' the household! Death takes up the tune!
The king gives voice, groans murder's prelude well!

LUKOS.

O, all the land of Kadmos! slain by guile!

CHOROS.

Ay, for who slew first? Paying back thy due,
Resign thee! make, for deeds done, mere amends!
Who was it grazed the gods through lawlessness—
Mortal himself, threw up his fool's-conceit
Against the blessed heavenly ones—as though
Gods had no power? Old friends, the impious man
Exists not any more! The house is mute.
Turn we to song and dance! For, those I love,
Those I wish well to, well fare they, to wish!

Dances, dances and banqueting
To Thebes, the sacred city through,
Are a care! for, change and change
Of tears to laughter, old to new,
Our lays, glad birth, they bring, they bring!
He is gone and past, the mighty king!
And the old one reigns, returned—O strange!
From the Acherontian harbour too!
Advent of hope, beyond thought's widest range!
To the gods, the gods, are crimes a care,
And they watch our virtue, well aware

That gold and that prosperity drive man
Out of his mind—those charioteers who hale
Might-without-right behind them: face who can
Fortune's reverse which time prepares, nor quail?
—He who evades law and in lawlessness
Delights him,—he has broken down his trust—
The chariot, riches haled—now blackening in the dust!

Ismenos, go thou garlanded!
Break into dance, ye ways, the polished bed
O' the seven-gated city! Dirké, thou
Fair-flowing, with the Asopiad sisters all,
Leave your sire's stream, attend the festival
Of Herakles, one choir of nymphs, sing triumph now!
O woody rock of Puthios and each home
O' the Helikonian Muses, ye shall come
With joyous shouting to my walls, my town
Where saw the light that Spartan race, those "Sown,"
Brazen-shield-bearing chiefs, whereof the band
With children's children renovates our land,
To Thebes a sacred light!
O combination of the marriage rite—
Bed of the mortal-born and Zeus, who couched
Beside the nymph of Perseus' progeny!
For credible, past hope, becomes to me
That nuptial story long ago avouched,

O Zeus! and time has turned the dark to bright,
And made one blaze of truth the Herakleidan might—
His, who emerged from earth's pavilion, left
Plouton's abode, the nether palace-cleft.
Thou wast the lord that nature gave me—not
That baseness born and bred—my king, by lot!
—Baseness made plain to all, who now regard
The match of sword with sword in fight,—
If to the gods the Just and Right
Still pleasing be, still claim the palm's award.

Horror!
Are we come to the self-same passion of fear,
Old friends?—such a phantasm fronts me here
Visible over the palace-roof!
In flight, in flight, the laggard limb
Bestir! and haste aloof
From that on the roof there—grand and grim!
O Paian, king!
Be thou my safeguard from the woeful thing!

IRIS.

Courage, old men! beholding here—Night's birth—
Madness, and me the handmaid of the gods,
Iris: since to your town we come, no plague—

Wage war against the house of but one man
From Zeus and from Alkmené sprung, they say.
Now, till he made an end of bitter toils,
Fate kept him safe, nor did his father Zeus
Let us once hurt him, Heré nor myself.
But, since he has toiled through Eurustheus' task,
Heré desires to fix fresh blood on him—
Slaying his children: I desire it too.

Up then, collecting the unsoftened heart,
Unwedded virgin of black Night! Drive, drag
Frenzy upon the man here—whirls of brain
Big with child-murder, while his feet leap gay!
Let go the bloody cable its whole length!
So that,—when o'er the Acherousian ford
He has sent floating, by self-homicide,
His beautiful boy-garland,—he may know
First, Heré's anger, what it is to him,
And then learn mine. The gods are vile indeed
And mortal matters vast, if he 'scape free!

MADNESS.

Certes, from well-born sire and mother too
Had I my birth, whose blood is Night's and Heaven's;
But here 's my glory,—not to grudge the good!

Nor love I raids against the friends of man.
I wish, then, to persuade,—before I see
You stumbling, you and Heré! trust my words!
This man, the house of whom ye hound me to,
Is not unfamed on earth nor gods among;
Since, having quelled waste land and savage sea,
He alone raised again the falling rights
Of gods—gone ruinous through impious men.
Desire no mighty mischief, I advise!

IRIS.

Give thou no thought to Heré's faulty schemes!

MADNESS.

Changing her step from faulty to fault-free!

IRIS.

Not to be wise, did Zeus' wife send thee here.

MADNESS.

Sun, thee I cite to witness—doing what I loathe to do!
But since indeed to Heré and thyself I must subserve,
And follow you quick, with a whizz, as the hounds a-hunt with the huntsman,

—Go I will! and neither the sea, as it groans with its waves so furiously,
Nor earthquake, no, nor the bolt of thunder gasping out heaven's labour-throe,
Shall cover the ground as I, at a bound, rush into the bosom of Herakles!
And home I scatter, and house I batter,
Having first of all made the children fall,—
And he who felled them is never to know
He gave birth to each child that received the blow,
Till the Madness, I am, have let him go!

Ha, behold! already he rocks his head—he is off from the starting-place!
Not a word, as he rolls his frightful orbs, from their sockets wrenched in the ghastly race!
And the breathings of him he tempers and times no more than a bull in act to toss,
And hideously he bellows invoking the Keres, daughters of Tartaros.
Ay, and I soon will dance thee madder, and pipe thee quite out of thy mind with fear!
So, up with the famous foot, thou Iris, march to Olumpos, leave me here!
Me and mine, who now combine, in the dreadful shape no mortal sees,

And now are about to pass, from without, inside of the home of Herakles!

CHOROS.

Ototoi,—groan!
Away is mown
Thy flower, Zeus' offspring, City!
Unhappy Hellas, who dost cast (the pity!)
Who worked thee all the good,
Away from thee,—destroyest in a mood
Of madness him, to death whom pipings dance!
There goes she, in her chariot,—groans, her brood,—
And gives her team the goad, as though adrift
For doom, Night's Gorgon, Madness, she whose glance
Turns man to marble! with what hissings lift
Their hundred heads the snakes, her head's inheritance!
Quick has the god changed fortune: through their sire
Quick will the children, that he saved, expire!
O miserable me! O Zeus! thy child—
Childless himself—soon vengeance, hunger-wild,
Craving for punishment, will lay how low—
Loaded with many a woe!

O palace-roofs! your courts about,
A measure begins all unrejoiced
By the tympanies and the thyrsos hoist
Of the Bromian revel-rout!

O ye domes! and the measure proceeds
For blood, not such as the cluster bleeds
Of the Dionusian pouring-out!

Break forth, fly, children! fatal this—
Fatal the lay that is piped, I wis!
Ay, for he hunts a children-chase—
Never shall Madness lead her revel
And leave no trace in the dwelling-place!
Ai ai, because of the evil!
Ai ai, the old man—how I groan
For the father, and not the father alone!
She who was nurse of his children,—small
Her gain that they ever were born at all!

See! See!
A whirlwind shakes hither and thither
The house—the roof falls in together!
Ha, ha, what dost thou, son of Zeus?
A trouble of Tartaros broke loose,
Such as once Pallas on the Titan thundered,
Thou sendest on thy domes, roof-shattered
and wall-sundered!

MESSENGER.

O bodies white with age!—

CHOROS.

What cry, to me—

What, dost thou call with?

MESSENGER.

There 's a curse indoors.

CHOROS.

I shall not bring a prophet: you suffice.

MESSENGER.

Dead are the children.

CHOROS.

Ai ai!

MESSENGER.

Groan! for, groans
Suit well the subject. Dire the children's death,
Dire too the parent's hands that dealt the fate.
No one could tell worse woe than we have borne.

CHOROS.

How dost thou that same curse—curse, cause for groan—

The father's on the children, make appear?
Tell in what matter they were hurled from heaven
Against the house—these evils; and recount
The children's hapless fate, O Messenger!

MESSENGER.

The victims were before the hearth of Zeus,
A household-expiation: since the king
O' the country, Herakles had killed and cast
From out the dwelling; and a beauteous choir
Of boys stood by his sire, too, and his wife.
And now the basket had been carried round
The altar in a circle, and we used
The consecrated speech. Alkmené's son,—
Just as he was about, in his right hand,
To bear the torch, that he might dip into
The cleansing-water,—came to a stand-still;
And, as their father yet delayed, his boys
Had their eyes on him. But he was himself
No longer: lost in rollings of the eyes;
Outthrusting eyes—their very roots—like blood!
Froth he dropped down his bushy-bearded cheek,
And said—together with a madman's laugh—
"Father! why sacrifice, before I slay
Eurustheus? why have twice the lustral fire,

And double pains, when 't is permitted me
To end, with one good hand-sweep, matters here?
Then,—when I hither bring Eurustheus' head,—
Then for these just slain, wash hands once for all!
Now,—cast drink-offerings forth, throw baskets down!
Who gives me bow and arrows, who my club?
I go to that Mukenai. One must match
Crowbars and mattocks, so that—those sunk stones
The Kuklops squared with picks and plumb-line red—
I, with my bent steel, may o'ertumble town."
Which said, he goes and—with no car to have—
Affirms he has one! mounts the chariot-board,
And strikes, as having really goad in hand!
And two ways laughed the servants—laugh with awe;
And one said, as each met the other's stare,
"Playing us boys' tricks? or is master mad?"
But up he climbs, and down along the roof,
And, dropping into the men's place, maintains
He 's come to Nisos city, when he 's come
Only inside his own house! then reclines
On floor, for couch, and, as arrived indeed,
Makes himself supper; goes through some brief stay
Then says he 's traversing the forest-flats
Of Isthmos; thereupon lays body bare
Of bucklings, and begins a contest with
—No one! and is proclaimed the conqueror—

He by himself—having called out to hear
—Nobody! Then, if you will take his word,
Blaring against Eurustheus horribly,
He 's at Mukenai. But his father laid
Hold of the strong hand and addressed him thus:
"O son, what ails thee? Of what sort is this
Extravagance? Has not some murder-craze,
Bred of those corpses thou didst just despatch,
Danced thee drunk?" But he,—taking him to crouch,
Eurustheus' sire, that apprehensive touched
His hand, a suppliant,—pushes him aside,
Gets ready quiver, and bends bow against
His children—thinking them Eurustheus' boys
He means to slay. They, horrified with fear,
Rushed here and there,—this child, into the robes
O' the wretched mother—this, beneath the shade
O' the column,—and this other, like a bird,
Cowered at the altar-foot. The mother shrieks
"Parent—what dost thou?—kill thy children?" So
Shriek the old sire and crowd of servitors.
But he, outwinding him, as round about
The column ran the boy,—a horrid whirl
O' the lathe his foot described!—stands opposite,
Strikes through the liver; and supine the boy
Bedews the stone shafts, breathing out his life.

But "Victory!" he shouted—boasted thus:
"Well, this one nestling of Eurustheus—dead—
Falls by me, pays back the paternal hate!"
Then bends bow on another who was crouched
At base of altar—overlooked, he thought—
And now prevents him, falls at father's knee,
Throwing up hand to beard and cheek above.
"O dearest!" cries he; "father, kill me not!
Yours I am—your boy: not Eurustheus' boy
You kill now!" But he, rolling the wild eye
Of Gorgon,—as the boy stood all too close
For deadly bowshot,—mimicry of smith
Who batters red-hot iron,—hand o'er head
Heaving his club, on the boy's yellow hair
Hurls it and breaks the bone. This second caught,—
He goes, would slay the third, one sacrifice
He and the couple; but, beforehand here,
The miserable mother catches up,
Carries him inside house and bars the gate.
Then he, as he were at those Kuklops' work,
Digs at, heaves doors up, wrenches doorposts out,
Lays wife and child low with the selfsame shaft.
And this done, at the old man's death he drives;
But there came, as it seemed to us who saw,
A statue—Pallas with the crested head,
Swinging her spear—and threw a stone which smote

Herakles' breast and stayed his slaughter-rage,
And sent him safe to sleep. He falls to ground—
Striking against the column with his back—
Column which, with the falling of the roof,
Broken in two, lay by the altar-base.
And we, foot-free now from our several flights,
Along with the old man, we fastened bonds
Of rope-noose to the column, so that he,
Ceasing from sleep, might not go adding deeds
To deeds done. And he sleeps a sleep, poor wretch,
No gift of any god! since he has slain
Children and wife. For me, I do not know
What mortal has more misery to bear.

CHOROS.

A murder there was which Argolis
Holds in remembrance, Hellas through,
As, at that time, best and famousest:
Of those, the daughters of Danaos slew.
A murder indeed was that! but this
Outstrips it, straight to the goal has pressed.
I am able to speak of a murder done
To the hapless Zeus-born offspring, too—
Prokné's son, who had but one—

Or a sacrifice to the Muses, say
Rather, who Itus sing alway,
Her single child. But thou, the sire
Of children three—O thou consuming fire!—
In one outrageous fate hast made them all expire.
And this outrageous fate—
What groan, or wail, or deadmen's dirge,
Or choric dance of Haides shall I urge
The Muse to celebrate?

Woe! woe! behold!
The portalled palace lies unrolled,
This way and that way, each prodigious fold!
Alas for me! these children, see,
Stretched, hapless group, before their father—he
The all-unhappy, who lies sleeping out
The murder of his sons, a dreadful sleep!
And bonds, see, all about,—
Rope-tangle, ties and tether,—these
Tightenings around the body of Herakles
To the stone columns of the house made fast!

But—like a bird that grieves
For callow nestlings some rude hand bereaves—
See, here, a bitter journey overpast,
The old man—all too late—is here at last!

AMPHITRUON.

Silently, silently, aged Kadmeians!
Will ye not suffer my son, diffused
Yonder, to slide from his sorrows in sleep?

CHOROS.

And thee, old man, do I, groaning, weep,
And the children too, and the head there—used
Of old to the wreaths and paians!

AMPHITRUON.

Farther away! Nor beat the breast,
Nor wail aloud, nor rouse from rest
The slumberer—asleep, so best!

CHOROS.

Ah me—what a slaughter!

AMPHITRUON.

Refrain—refrain!
Ye will prove my perdition.

CHOROS.

Unlike water,
Bloodshed rises from earth again.

AMPHITRUON.

Do I bid you bate your breath, in vain—
Ye elders? Lament in a softer strain!
Lest he rouse himself, burst every chain,
And bury the city in ravage—bray
Father and house to dust away!

CHOROS.

I cannot forbear—I cannot forbear!

AMPHITRUON.

Hush! I will learn his breathings: there!
I will lay my ears close.

CHOROS.

What, he sleeps?

AMPHITRUON.

Ay,—sleeps! A horror of slumber keeps
The man who has piled
On wife and child
Death and death, as he shot them down
With clang o' the bow.

CHOROS.

Wail—

AMPHITRUON.

Even so!

CHOROS.

—The fate of the children—

AMPHITRUON.

Triple woe

CHOROS.

—Old man, the fate of thy son!

AMPHITRUON.

Hush, hush! Have done!
He is turning about!
He is breaking out!
Away! I steal
And my body conceal,
Before he arouse,
In the depths of the house.

CHOROS.

Courage! The Night

Maintains her right
On the lids of thy son there, sealed from sight!

AMPHITRUON.

See, see! To leave the light
And, wretch that I am, bear one last ill,
I do not avoid; but if he kill
Me his own father, and devise
Beyond the present miseries
A misery more ghastly still—
And to haunt him, over and above
Those here who, as they used to love,
Now hate him, what if he have with these
My murder, the worst of Erinues?

CHOROS.

Then was the time to die, for thee,
When ready to wreak in the full degree
Vengeance on those
Thy consort's foes
Who murdered her brothers! glad, life's close,
With the Taphioi down,
And sacked their town
Clustered about with a wash of sea!

AMPHITRUON.

To flight—to flight!
Away from the house, troop off, old men!
Save yourselves out of the maniac's sight!
He is rousing himself right up: and then,
Murder on murder heaping anew,
He will revel in blood your city through!

CHOROS.

O Zeus, why hast, with such unmeasured hate,
Hated thy son, whelmed in this sea of woes?

HERAKLES.

Ha,—
In breath indeed I am—see things I ought—
Æther, and earth, and these the sunbeam-shafts!
But then—some billow and strange whirl of sense
I have fallen into! and breathings hot I breathe—
Smoked upwards, not the steady work from lungs.
See now! Why bound,—at moorings like a ship,—
About my young breast and young arm, to this
Stone piece of carved work broke in half, do I
Sit, have my rest in corpses' neighbourhood?
Strewn on the ground are winged darts, and bow
Which played my brother-shieldman, held in hand,—

Guarded my side, and got my guardianship!
I cannot have gone back to Haides—twice
Begun Eurustheus' race I ended thence?
But I nor see the Sisupheian stone,
Nor Plouton, nor Demeter's sceptred maid!
I am struck witless sure! Where can I be?
Ho there! what friend of mine is near or far—
Some one to cure me of bewilderment?
For nought familiar do I recognize.

AMPHITRUON.

Old friends, shall I go close to these my woes?

CHOROS.

Ay, and let me too,—nor desert your ills!

HERAKLES.

Father, why weepest thou, and buriest up
Thine eyes, aloof so from thy much-loved son?

AMPHITRUON.

O child!—for, faring badly, mine thou art!

HERAKLES.

Do I fare somehow ill, that tears should flow?

AMPHITRUON.

Ill,—would cause any god who bore, to groan!

HERAKLES.

That 's boasting, truly! still, you state no hap.

AMPHITRUON.

For, thyself seest—if in thy wits again.

HERAKLES.

Heyday! How riddlingly that hint returns!

AMPHITRUON.

Well, I am trying—art thou sane and sound!

HERAKLES.

Say if thou lay'st aught strange to my life's charge!

AMPHITRUON.

If thou no more art Haides-drunk,—I tell!

HERAKLES.

I bring to mind no drunkenness of soul.

AMPHITRUON.

Shall I unbind my son, old men, or what?

HERAKLES.

And who was binder, tell!—not *that*, my deed!

AMPHITRUON.

Mind that much of misfortune—pass the rest!

HERAKLES.

Enough! from silence, I nor learn nor wish.

AMPHITRUON.

O Zeus, dost witness here throned Heré's work?

HERAKLES.

But have I had to bear aught hostile thence?

AMPHITRUON.

Let be the goddess—bury thine own guilt!

HERAKLES.

Undone! What is the sorrow thou wilt say?

AMPHITRUON.

Look! See the ruins of thy children here!

HERAKLES.

Ah me! What sight do wretched I behold?

AMPHITRUON.

Unfair fight, son, this fight thou fastenedst
On thine own children!

HERAKLES.

What fight? Who slew these?

AMPHITRUON.

Thou and thy bow, and who of gods was cause.

HERAKLES.

How say'st? What did I? Ill-announcing sire!

AMPHITRUON.

—Go mad! Thou askest a sad clearing up.

HERAKLES.

And am I also murderer of my wife?

AMPHITRUON.

All the work here was just one hand's work—thine!

HERAKLES.

Ai ai—for groans encompass me—a cloud!

AMPHITRUON.

For these deeds' sake do I begroan thy fate.

HERAKLES.

Did I break up my house or dance it down?

AMPHITRUON.

I know just one thing—all 's a woe with thee.

HERAKLES.

But where did the craze catch me? where destroy?

AMPHITRUON.

When thou didst cleanse hands at the altar-flame.

HERAKLES.

Ah me! why is it then I save my life—
Proved murderer of my dearest ones, my boys?

Shall not I rush to the rock-level's leap,
Or, darting sword through breast and all, become
My children's blood-avenger? or, this flesh
Burning away with fire, so thrust away
The infamy, which waits me there, from life?

Ah but,—a hindrance to my purposed death,
Theseus arrives, my friend and kinsman, here!
Eyes will be on me! my child-murder-plague
In evidence before friends loved so much!
O me, what shall I do? Where, taking wing
Or gliding underground, shall I seek out
A solitariness from misery?
I will pull night upon my muffled head!
Let this wretch here content him with his curse
Of blood: I would pollute no innocents.

THESEUS.

I come,—with others who await beside
Asopos' stream, the armed Athenian youth,—
Bring thy son, old man, spear's fight-fellowship!
For a bruit reached the Erechtheidai's town
That, having seized the sceptre of this realm,
Lukos prepares you battle-violence.
So, paying good back,—Herakles began,

Saving me down there,—I have come, old man,
If aught, of my hand or my friends', you want.
What 's here? Why all these corpses on the ground?
Am I perhaps behindhand—come too late
For newer ill? Who killed these children now?
Whose wife was she, this woman I behold?
Boys, at least, take no stand in reach of spear!
Some other woe than war, I chance upon.

AMPHITRUON.

O thou, who sway'st the olive-bearing height!—

THESEUS.

Why hail'st thou me with woeful prelude thus?

AMPHITRUON.

Dire sufferings have we suffered from the gods.

HESEUS.

These boys,—who are they thou art weeping o'er?

AMPHITRUON.

He gave them birth, indeed, my hapless son!
Begot, but killed them—dared their bloody death.

THESEUS.

Speak no such horror!

AMPHITRUON.

Would I might obey!

THESEUS.

O teller of dread tidings!

AMPHITRUON.

Lost are we—

Lost—flown away from life!

THESEUS.

What sayest thou?

What did he?

AMPHITRUON.

Erring through a frenzy-fit,
He did all, with the arrows dipt in dye
Of hundred-headed Hudra.

THESEUS.

Heré's strife!

But who is this among the dead, old man?

AMPHITRUON.

Mine, mine, this progeny—the labour-plagued,
Who went with gods once to Phlegruia's plain,
And in the giant-slaying war bore shield.

THESEUS.

Woe—woe! What man was born mischanceful thus!

AMPHITRUON.

Thou couldst not know another mortal man
Toil-weary, more outworn by wanderings.

THESEUS.

And why i' the peploi hides he his sad head?

AMPHITRUON.

Not daring meet thine eye, thy friendliness
And kinship,—nor that children's-blood about.

THESEUS.

But *I* come to who shared my woe with me!
Uncover him!

AMPHITRUON.

O child, put from thine eyes

The peplos, throw it off, show face to sun!
Woe's weight well matched contends with tears in thee.
I supplicate thee, falling at thy cheek
And knee and hand, and shedding this old tear!
O son, remit the savage lion's mood,
Since to a bloody, an unholy race
Art thou led forth, if thou be resolute
To go on adding ill to ill, my child!

THESEUS.

Let me speak! Thee, who sittest—seated woe—
I call upon to show thy friends thine eye!
For there 's no darkness has a cloud so black
May hide thy misery thus absolute.
Why, waving hand, dost sign me—murder 's done?
Lest a pollution strike me, from thy speech?
Nought care I to—with thee, at least—fare ill:
For I had joy once! *Then*,—soul rises to,—
When thou didst save me from the dead to light!
Friends' gratitude that tastes old age, I loathe,
And him who likes to share when things look fine,
But, sail along with friends in trouble—no!
Arise, uncover thine unhappy head!
Look on us! Every man of the right race
Bears what, at least, the gods inflict, nor shrinks.

HERAKLES.

Theseus, hast seen this match—my boys with me?

THESEUS.

I heard of, now I see the ills thou sign'st.

HERAKLES.

Why then hast thou displayed my head to sun?

THESEUS.

Why? mortals bring no plague on aught divine.

HERAKLES.

Fly, O unhappy, this my impious plague!

THESEUS.

No plague of vengeance flits to friends from friends.

HERAKLES.

I praise thee. But I helped thee,—that is truth.

THESEUS.

And I, advantaged then, now pity thee.

HERAKLES.

—The pitiable,—my children's murderer!

THESEUS.

I mourn for thy sake, in this altered lot.

HERAKLES.

Hast thou found others in still greater woe?

THESEUS.

Thou, from earth, touchest heaven, one huge distress!

HERAKLES.

Accordingly, I am prepared to die.

THESEUS.

Think'st thou thy threats at all import the gods?

HERAKLES.

Gods please themselves: to gods I give their like.

THESEUS.

Shut thy mouth, lest big words bring bigger woe!

HERAKLES.

I am full fraught with ills—no stowing more!

THESEUS.

Thou wilt do—what, then? Whither moody borne?

HERAKLES.

Dying, I go below earth whence I came.

THESEUS.

Thou hast used words of—what man turns up first!

HERAKLES.

While thou, being outside sorrow, schoolest me.

THESEUS.

The much-enduring Herakles talks thus?—

HERAKLES.

Not the so much-enduring: measure 's past.

THESEUS.

— Mainstay to mortals, and their mighty friend?

HERAKLES.

They nowise profit me: but Heré rules.

THESEUS.

Hellas forbids thou shouldst ineptly die.

HERAKLES.

But hear, then, how I strive by arguments
Against thy teachings! I will ope thee out
My life—past, present—as unliveable.
First, I was born of this man, who had slain
His mother's aged sire, and, sullied so,
Married Alkmené, she who gave me birth.
Now, when the basis of a family
Is not laid right, what follows needs must fall;
And Zeus, whoever Zeus is, formed me foe
To Heré (take not thou offence, old man!
Since father, in Zeus' stead, account I thee),
And, while I was at suck yet, frightful snakes
She introduced among my swaddling-clothes,—
That bedfellow of Zeus!—to end me so.
But when I gained the youthful garb of flesh,
The labours I endured—what need to tell?
What lions ever, or three-bodied brutes,
Tuphons or giants, or the four-legg'd swarms

Of Kentaur-battle, did not I end out?
And that hound, headed all about with heads
Which cropped up twice, the Hudra, having slain—
I both went through a myriad other toils
In full drove, and arrived among the dead
To convoy, as Eurustheus bade, to light
Haides' three-headed dog and doorkeeper.
But then I,—wretch,—dared this last labour—see!
Slew my sons, keystone-coped my house with ills.
To such a strait I come! nor my dear Thebes
Dare I inhabit: and, suppose I stay?
Into what fane or festival of friends
Am I to go? My curse scarce courts accost!
Shall I seek Argos? How, if fled from home?
But say—I hurry to some other town!
And there they eye me, as notorious now,—
Kept by sharp tongue-taunts under lock and key—
"Is not this he, Zeus' son, who murdered once
Children and wife? Let him go rot elsewhere!"
To any man renowned as happy once,
Reverses are a grave thing; but to whom
Evil is old acquaintance there 's no hurt
To speak of, he and misery are twins.
To this degree of woe I think to come:
For earth will utter voice forbidding me
To touch the ground, and sea—to pierce the wave,

The river-springs—to drink, and I shall play
Ixion's part quite out, the chained and wheeled!
And best of all will be, if so I 'scape
Sight from one man of those Hellenes,—once
I lived among, felicitous and rich!
Why ought I then to live? What gain accrues
From good-for-nothing, wicked life I lead?
In fine, let Zeus' brave consort dance and sing,
Stamp foot, the Olumpian Zeus' own sandal-trick!
What she has willed, that brings her will to pass—
The foremost man of Hellas pedestalled,
Up, over, and down whirling! Who would pray
To such a goddess?—that, begrudging Zeus
Because he loved a woman, ruins me—
Lover of Hellas, faultless of the wrong!

THESEUS.

This strife is from no other of the gods
Than Zeus' wife; rightly apprehend, as well,
Why, to no death—thou meditatest now—
I would persuade thee, but to bear thy woes!
None, none of mortals boasts a fate unmixed,
Nor gods—if poets' teaching be not false.
Have not they joined in wedlock against law
With one another? not, for sake of rule,
Branded their sires in bondage? Yet they house,

All the same, in Olumpos, carry heads
High there, notorious sinners though they be!
What wilt thou say, then, if thou, mortal-born,
Bearest outrageously fate gods endure?
Leave Thebes, now, pay obedience to the law
And follow me to Pallas' citadel!
There, when thy hands are purified from stain,
House will I give thee, and goods shared alike.
What gifts I hold too from the citizens
For saving twice seven children, when I slew
The Knosian bull, these also give I thee.
And everywhere about the land are plots
Apportioned me: these, named by thine own name,
Shall be henceforward styled by all men—thine,
Thy life long; but at death, when Haides-bound,
All Athens shall uphold the honoured one
With sacrifices, and huge marble heaps:
For that 's a fair crown our Hellenes grant
Their people—glory, should they help the brave!
And I repay thee back this grace for thine
That saved me, now that thou art lorn of friends -
Since, when the gods give honour, friends may flit:
For, a god's help suffices, if he please.

HERAKLES

Ah me, these words are foreign to my woes!

I neither fancy gods love lawless beds,
Nor, that with chains they bind each other's hands,
Have I judged worthy faith, at any time;
Nor shall I be persuaded—one is born
His fellows' master! since God stands in need—
If he is really God—of nought at all.
These are the poets' pitiful conceits!
But this it was I pondered, though woe-whelmed—
"Take heed lest thou be taxed with cowardice
Somehow in leaving thus the light of day!"
For whoso cannot make a stand against
These same misfortunes, neither could withstand
A mere man's dart, oppose death, strength to strength.
Therefore unto thy city I will go
And have the grace of thy ten thousand gifts.
There! I have tasted of ten thousand toils
As truly—never waived a single one,
Nor let these runnings drop from out my eyes:
Nor ever thought it would have come to this—
That I from out my eyes do drop tears. Well!
At present, as it seems, one bows to fate.
So be it! Old man, thou seest my exile—
Seest, too, me—my children's murderer!
These give thou to the tomb, and deck the dead,
Doing them honour with thy tears—since me
Law does not sanction. Propping on her breast,

And giving them into their mother's arms,
—Re-institute the sad community
Which I, unhappy, brought to nothingness—
Not by my will! And, when earth hides the dead,
Live in this city!—sad, but, all the same,
Force thy soul to bear woe along with me!
O children, who begat and gave you birth—
Your father—has destroyed you! nought you gain
By those fair deeds of mine I laid you up,
As by main-force I laboured glory out
To give you,—that fine gift of fatherhood!
And thee, too, O my poor one, I destroyed,
Not rendering like for like, as when thou kept'st
My marriage-bed inviolate,—those long
Household-seclusions draining to the dregs
Inside my house! O me, my wife, my boys—
And—O myself, how, miserably moved,
Am I disyoked now from both boys and wife!
O bitter those delights of kisses now—
And bitter these my weapons' fellowship!
For I am doubtful whether shall I keep
Or cast away these arrows which will clang
Ever such words out, as they knock my side—
"Us—thou didst murder wife and children with!
Us—child-destroyers—still thou keepest thine!"
Ha, shall I bear them in my arms, then? What

Say for excuse? Yet, naked of my darts
Wherewith I did my bravest, Hellas through,
Throwing myself beneath foot to my foes,
Shall I die basely? No! relinquishment
Of these must never be,—companions once.
We sorrowfully must observe the pact.
In just one thing, co-operate with me
Thy sad friend, Theseus! Go along with him
To Argos, and in concert get arranged
The price my due for bringing there the Hound!
O land of Kadmos, Theban people all,
Shear off your locks, lament one wide lament,
Go to my children's grave and, in one strain,
Lament the whole of us—my dead and me—
Since all together are fordone and lost,
Smitten by Heré's single stroke of fate!

THESEUS.

Rise up now from thy dead ones! Tears enough,
Poor friend!

HERAKLES.

I cannot: for my limbs are fixed.

THESEUS.

Ay: even these strong men fate overthrows.

HERAKLES.

Woe!
Here might I grow a stone, nor mind woes more!

THESEUS.

Cease! Give thy hand to friendly helpmate now!

HERAKLES.

Nay, but I wipe off blood upon thy robes.

THESEUS.

Squeeze out and spare no drop! I take it all!

HERAKLES.

Of sons bereaved, I have thee like my son.

THESEUS.

Give to my neck thy hand! 't is I will lead.

HERAKLES.

Yoke-fellows friendly—one heart-broken, though!
O father, such a man we need for friend!

AMPHITRUON.

Certes the land that bred him boasts good sons.

HERAKLES.

Turn me round, Theseus—to behold my boys!

THESEUS.

What? will the having such a love-charm soothe?

HERAKLES.

I want it; and to press my father's breast.

AMPHITRUON.

See here, O son! for, what I love thou seek'st.

THESEUS.

Strange! Of thy labours no more memory?

HERAKLES.

All those were less than these, those ills I bore.

THESEUS.

Who sees thee grow a woman,—will not praise.

HERAKLES.

I live low to thee? Not so once, I think.

THESEUS.

Too low by far! "Famed Herakles"—where 's he?

HERAKLES.

Down amid evils, of what kind wast *thou*?

THESEUS.

As far as courage—least of all mankind!

HERAKLES.

How say'st, then, *I* in evils shrink to nought?

THESEUS.

Forward!

HERAKLES.

Farewell, old father!

AMPHITRUON.

Thou too, son!

HERAKLES.

Bury the boys as I enjoined!

AMPHITRUON.

And *me*—

Who will be found to bury now, my child?

HERAKLES.

Myself.

AMPHITRUON.

When, coming?

HERAKLES.

When thy task is done.

AMPHITRUON.

How?

HERAKLES.

I will have thee carried forth from Thebes
To Athens. But bear in the children, earth
Is burthened by! Myself,—who with these shames
Have cast away my house,—a ruined hulk,
I follow—trailed by Theseus—on my way;
And whoso rather would have wealth and strength
Than good friends, reasons foolishly therein.

CHOROS.

And we depart, with sorrow at heart,
Sobs that increase with tears that start;
The greatest of all our friends of yore
We have lost for evermore!

When the long silence ended,—"Our best friend—
Lost, our best friend!" he muttered musingly.
Then, "Lachares the sculptor" (half aloud)
"Sinned he or sinned he not? 'Outrageous sin!'
Shuddered our elders, 'Pallas should be clothed:
He carved her naked.' 'But more beautiful!'
Answers this generation: 'Wisdom formed
For love not fear!' And there the statue stands,
Entraps the eye severer art repels.
Moreover, Pallas wields the thunderbolt
Yet has not struck the artist all this while.
Pheidias and Aischulos? Euripides
And Lachares? But youth will have its way.
The ripe man ought to be as old as young—
As young as old. I too have youth at need.
Much may be said for stripping wisdom bare.

"And who 's 'our best friend'? You play kottabos;
Here 's the last mode of playing. Take a sphere
With orifices at due interval,
Through topmost one of which, a throw adroit
Sends wine from cup, clean passage, from outside
To where, in hollow midst, a manikin
Suspended ever bobs with head erect
Right underneath whatever hole 's a-top
When you set orb a-rolling: plumb, he gets

Ever this benediction of the splash.
An other-fashioned orb presents him fixed:
Of all the outlets, he fronts only one,
And only when that one,—and rare the chance,—
Comes uppermost, does he turn upward too:
He can't turn all sides with the turning orb.
Inside this sphere of life,—all objects, sense
And soul perceive,—Euripides hangs fixed,
Gets knowledge through the single aperture
Of High and Right: with visage fronting these
He waits the wine thence ere he operate,
Work in the world and write a tragedy.
When that hole happens to revolve to point,
In drops the knowledge, waiting meets reward.
But, duly in rotation, Low and Wrong—
When these enjoy the moment's altitude,
His heels are found just where his head should be!
No knowledge that way! *I* am moveable,—
To slightest shift of orb make prompt response,
Face Low and Wrong and Weak and all the rest,
And still drink knowledge, wine-drenched every turn,—
Equally favoured by their opposites.
Little and Bad exist, are natural:
Then let me know them, and be twice as great
As he who only knows one phase of life!
So doubly shall I prove 'best friend of man,'

If I report the whole truth—Vice, perceived
While he shut eyes to all but Virtue there.
Man 's made of both: and both must be of use
To somebody: if not to him, to me.
While, as to your imaginary Third
Who, stationed (by mechanics past my guess)
So as to take in every side at once,
And not successively,—may reconcile
The High and Low in tragi-comic verse,—
He shall be hailed superior to us both
When born—in the Tin-islands! Meantime, here
In bright Athenai, I contest the claim,
Call myself Iostephanos' 'best friend,'
Who took my own course, worked as I descried
Ordainment, stuck to my first faculty.

"For listen! There 's no failure breaks the heart,
Whate'er be man's endeavour in this world,
Like the rash poet's when he—nowise fails
By poetizing badly,—Zeus or makes
Or mars a man, so—at it, merrily!
But when,—made man,—much like myself,—equipt
For such and such achievement,—rash he turns
Out of the straight path, bent on snatch of feat
From—who 's the appointed fellow born thereto,—
Crows take him!—in your Kassiterides?

Half-doing his work, leaving mine untouched,
That were the failure. Here I stand, heart-whole,
No Thamuris!

"Well thought of, Thamuris!
Has zeal, pray, for 'best friend' Euripides
Allowed you to observe the honour done
His elder rival, in our Poikilé?
You don't know? Once and only once, trod stage,
Sang and touched lyre in person, in his youth,
Our Sophokles,—youth, beauty, dedicate
To Thamuris who named the tragedy.
The voice of him was weak; face, limbs and lyre,
These were worth saving: Thamuris stands yet
Perfect as painting helps in such a case.
At least you know the story, for 'best friend'
Enriched his 'Rhesos' from the Blind Bard's store;
So haste and see the work, and lay to heart
What it was struck me when I eyed the piece!
Here stands a poet punished for rash strife
With Powers above his power, who see with sight
Beyond his vision, sing accordingly
A song, which he must needs dare emulate.
Poet, remain the man nor ape the Muse!

"But—lend me the psalterion! Nay, for once—

Once let my hand fall where the other's lay!
I see it, just as I were Sophokles,
That sunrise and combustion of the east!"

And then he sang—are these unlike the words?

Thamuris marching,—lyre and song of Thrace—
(Perpend the first, the worst of woes that were
Allotted lyre and song, ye poet-race!)

Thamuris from Oichalia, feasted there
By kingly Eurutos of late, now bound
For Dorion at the uprise broad and bare

Of Mount Pangaios (ore with earth enwound
Glittered beneath his footstep)—marching gay
And glad, Thessalia through, came, robed and crowned,

From triumph on to triumph, mid a ray
Of early morn,—came, saw and knew the spot
Assigned him for his worst of woes, that day.

Balura—happier while its name was not—
Met him, but nowise menaced; slipt aside,
Obsequious river to pursue its lot

Of solacing the valley—say, some wide
Thick busy human cluster, house and home,
Embanked for peace, or thrift that thanks the tide.

Thamuris, marching, laughed "Each flake of foam"
(As sparklingly the ripple raced him by)
"Mocks slower clouds adrift in the blue dome!"

For Autumn was the season; red the sky
Held morn's conclusive signet of the sun
To break the mists up, bid them blaze and die.

Morn had the mastery as, one by one
All pomps produced themselves along the tract
From earth's far ending to near heaven begun.

Was there a ravaged tree? it laughed compact
With gold, a leaf-ball crisp, high-brandished now,
Tempting to onset frost which late attacked.

Was there a wizened shrub, a starveling bough,
A fleecy thistle filched from by the wind,
A weed, Pan's trampling hoof would disallow?

Each, with a glory and a rapture twined
About it, joined the rush of air and light
And force: the world was of one joyous mind.

Say not the birds flew! they forebore their right—
Swam, revelling onward in the roll of things.
Say not the beasts' mirth bounded! that was flight—

How could the creatures leap, no lift of wings?
Such earth's community of purpose, such
The ease of earth's fulfilled imaginings,—

So did the near and far appear to touch
I' the moment's transport,—that an interchange
Of function, far with near, seemed scarce too much;

And had the rooted plant aspired to range
With the snake's license, while the insect yearned
To glow fixed as the flower, it were not strange—

No more than if the fluttery tree-top turned
To actual music, sang itself aloft;
Or if the wind, impassioned chantress, earned

The right to soar embodied in some soft
Fine form all fit for cloud-companionship,
And, blissful, once touch beauty chased so oft.

Thamuris, marching, let no fancy slip
Born of the fiery transport; lyre and song
Were his, to smite with hand and launch from lip—

Peerless recorded, since the list grew long
Of poets (saith Homeros) free to stand
Pedestalled mid the Muses' temple-throng,

A statued service, laurelled, lyre in hand,
(Ay, for we see them)—Thamuris of Thrace
Predominating foremost of the band.

Therefore the morn-ray that enriched his face,
If it gave lambent chill, took flame again
From flush of pride; he saw, he knew the place.

What wind arrived with all the rhythms from plain,
Hill, dale, and that rough wildwood interspersed?
Compounding these to one consummate strain,

It reached him, music; but his own outburst
Of victory concluded the account,
And that grew song which was mere music erst.

"Be my Parnassos, thou Pangaian mount!
And turn thee, river, nameless hitherto!
Famed shalt thou vie with famed Pieria's fount!

"Here I await the end of this ado:
Which wins—Earth's poet or the Heavenly Muse." . . .

But song broke up in laughter. "Tell the rest
Who may! *I* have not spurned the common life,
Nor vaunted mine a lyre to match the Muse
Who sings for gods, not men! Accordingly,
I shall not decorate her vestibule—
Mute marble, blind the eyes and quenched the brain,
Loose in the hand a bright, a broken lyre!
—Not Thamuris but Aristophanes!

"There! I have sung content back to myself,
And started subject for a play beside.
My next performance shall content you both.
Did 'Prelude-Battle' maul 'best friend' too much?
Then 'Main-Fight' be my next song, fairness' self!
Its subject—Contest for the Tragic Crown.
Ay, you shall hear none else but Aischulos
Lay down the law of Tragedy, and prove
'Best friend' a stray-away,—no praise denied
His manifold deservings, never fear—
Nor word more of the old fun! Death defends.
Sound admonition has its due effect.
Oh, you have uttered weighty words, believe!
Such as shall bear abundant fruit, next year,
In judgment, regular, legitimate.
Let Bacchos' self preside in person! Ay—
For there 's a buzz about those 'Bacchanals'

Rumour attributes to your great and dead
For final effort: just the prodigy
Great dead men leave, to lay survivors low!
—Until we make acquaintance with our fate
And find, fate's worst done, we, the same, survive
Perchance to honour more the patron-god,
Fitlier inaugurate a festal year.
Now that the cloud has broken, sky laughs blue,
Earth blossoms youthfully. Athenai breathes.
After a twenty-six years' wintry blank
Struck from her life,—war-madness, one long swoon,
She wakes up: Arginousai bids good cheer.
We have disposed of Kallikratidas;
Once more will Sparté sue for terms,—who knows?
Cede Dekeleia, as the rumour runs:
Terms which Athenai, of right mind again,
Accepts—she can no other. Peace declared,
Have my long labours borne their fruit or no?
Grinned coarse buffoonery so oft in vain?
Enough—it simply saved you. Saved ones, praise
Theoria's beauty and Opora's breadth!
Nor, when Peace realizes promised bliss,
Forget the Bald Bard, Envy! but go burst
As the cup goes round and the cates abound,
Collops of hare with roast spinks rare!
Confess my pipings, dancings, posings served

A purpose: guttlings, guzzlings, had their use!
Say whether light Muse, Rosy-finger-tips,
Or 'best friend's' heavy-hand, Melpomené,
Touched lyre to purpose, played Amphion's part,
And built Athenai to the skies once more!
Farewell, brave couple! Next year, welcome me!"

No doubt, in what he said that night, sincere!
One story he referred to, false or fact,
Was not without adaptability.
They do say—Lais the Corinthian once
Chancing to see Euripides (who paced
Composing in a garden, tablet-book
In left hand, with appended stulos prompt)
"Answer me," she began, "O Poet,—this!
What didst intend by writing in thy play
Go hang, thou filthy doer?" Struck on heap,
Euripides, at the audacious speech—
"Well now," quoth he, "thyself art just the one
I should imagine fit for deeds of filth!"
She laughingly retorted his own line
"What 's filth,—unless who does it, thinks it so?"

So might he doubtless think. "Farewell," said we.

And he was gone, lost in the morning-grey
Rose-streaked and gold to eastward. Did we dream?
Could the poor twelve-hours hold this argument
We render durable from fugitive,
As duly at each sunset's droop of sail,
Delay of oar, submission to sea-might,
I still remember, you as duly dint
Remembrance, with the punctual rapid style,
Into—what calm cold page!

Thus soul escapes
From eloquence made captive: thus mere words
—Ah, would the lifeless body stay! But no:
Change upon change till,—who may recognize
What did soul service, in the dusty heap?
What energy of Aristophanes
Inflames the wreck Balaustion saves to show?
Ashes be evidence how fire—with smoke—
All night went lamping on! But morn must rise.
The poet—I shall say—burned up and, blank
Smouldered this ash, now white and cold enough.

Nay, Euthukles! for best, though mine it be,
Comes yet. Write on, write ever, wrong no word!

Add, first,—he gone, if jollity went too,

Some of the graver mood, which mixed and marred,
Departed likewise. Sight of narrow scope
Has this meek consolation: neither ills
We dread, nor joys we dare anticipate,
Perform to promise. Each soul sows a seed
Euripides and Aristophanes;
Seed bears crop, scarce within our little lives;
But germinates,—perhaps enough to judge,—
Next year?

Whereas, next year brought harvest time!
For, next year came, and went not, but is now,
Still now, while you and I are bound for Rhodes
That 's all but reached—and harvest has it brought,
Dire as the homicidal dragon-crop.
Sophokles had dismissal ere it dawned,
Happy as ever; though men mournfully
Plausive,—when only soul could triumph now,
And Iophon produced his father's play,—
Crowned the consummate song where Oidipous
Dared the descent mid earthquake-thundering,
And hardly Theseus' hands availed to guard
Eyes from the horror, as their grove disgorged
Its dread ones, while each daughter sank to ground.

Then Aristophanes, on heel of that,

Triumphant also, followed with his "Frogs:"
Produced at next Lenaia,—three months since,—
The promised Main-Fight, loyal, license-free!
As if the poet, primed with Thasian juice,
(Himself swore—wine that conquers every kind
For long abiding in the head) could fix
Thenceforward any object in its truth,
Through eyeballs bathed by mere Castalian dew,
Nor miss the borrowed medium,—vinous drop
That colours all to the right crimson pitch
When mirth grows mockery, censure takes the tinge
Of malice!

All was Aristophanes:
There blazed the glory, there shot black the shame.
Ay, Bacchos did stand forth, the Tragic God
In person! and when duly dragged through mire,—
Having lied, filched, played fool, proved coward, flung
The boys their dose of fit indecency,
And finally got trounced to heart's content,
At his own feast, in his own theatre
(—Oh never fear! 'T was consecrated sport,
Exact tradition, warranted no whit
Offensive to instructed taste,—indeed,
Essential to Athenai's liberty,
Could the poor stranger understand!) why, then—

He was pronounced the rarely-qualified
To rate the work, adjust the claims to worth,
Of Aischulos (of whom, in other mood,
This same appreciative poet pleased
To say "He 's all one stiff and gluey piece
Of back of swine's neck!")—and of Chatterbox
Who, "twisting words like wool," usurped his seat
In Plouton's realm: "the arch-rogue, liar, scamp
That lives by snatching-up of altar-orts,"
—Who failed to recognize Euripides?

Then came a contest for supremacy—
Crammed full of genius, wit and fun and freak.
No spice of undue spite to spoil the dish
Of all sorts,—for the Mystics matched the Frogs
In poetry, no Seiren sang so sweet!—
Till, pressed into the service (how dispense
With Phaps-Elaphion and free foot-display?)
The Muse of dead Euripides danced frank,
Rattled her bits of tile, made all too plain
How baby-work like "Herakles" had birth:
Last, Bacchos,—candidly disclaiming brains
Able to follow finer argument,—
Confessed himself much moved by three main facts:
First,—if you stick a "Lost his flask of oil"
At pause of period, you perplex the sense—

Were it the Elegy for Marathon!
Next, if you weigh two verses, "car"—the word,
Will outweigh "club"—the word, in each packed line!
And—last, worst fact of all!—in rivalry
The younger poet dared to improvise
Laudation less distinct of—Triphales?
(Nay, that served when ourself abused the youth!)
Pheidippides? (nor that's appropriate now!)
Then,—Alkibiades, our city's hope,
Since times change and we Comics should change too!
These three main facts, well weighed, drew judgment down,
Conclusively assigned the wretch his fate—
"Fate due" admonished the sage Mystic choir,
"To sitting, prate-apace, with Sokrates,
Neglecting music and each tragic aid!"
—All wound-up by a wish "We soon may cease
From certain griefs, and warfare, worst of them!"
—Since, deaf to Comedy's persistent voice,
War still raged, still was like to rage. In vain
Had Sparté cried once more "But grant us Peace
We give you Dekeleia back!" Too shrewd
Was Kleophon to let escape, forsooth,
The enemy—at final gasp, besides!

So, Aristophanes obtained the prize,

And so Athenai felt she had a friend
Far better than her "best friend," lost last year;
And so, such fame had "Frogs" that, when came round
This present year, those Frogs croaked gay again
At the great Feast, Elaphebolion-month.
Only—there happened Aigispotamoi!

And, in the midst of the frog-merriment,
Plump on the sudden, pounces stern King Stork
On the light-hearted people of the marsh!
Spartan Lusandros swooped precipitate,
Ended Athenai, rowed her sacred bay
With oars which brought a hundred triremes back
Captive!

And first word of the conqueror
Was "Down with those Long Walls, Peiraios' pride!
Destroy, yourselves, your bulwarks! Peace needs none!"
And "We obey" they shuddered in their dream.

But, at next quick imposure of decree—
"No longer democratic government!
Henceforth such oligarchy as ourselves
Please to appoint you!"—then the horror stung
Dreamers awake; they started up a-stare
At the half-helot captain and his crew

—Spartans, "men used to let their hair grow long,
To fast, be dirty, and just—Socratize"—
Whose word was "Trample on Themistokles!"

So, as the way is with much misery,
The heads swam, hands refused their office, hearts
Sunk as they stood in stupor. "Wreck the Walls?
Ruin Peiraios?—with our Pallas armed
For interference?—Herakles apprised,
And Theseus hasting? Lay the Long Walls low?"

Three days they stood, stared,—stonier than their walls.

Whereupon, sleep who might, Lusandros woke:
Saw the prostration of his enemy,
Utter and absolute beyond belief,
Past hope of hatred even. I surmise
He also probably saw fade in fume
Certain fears, bred of Bakis-prophecy,
Nor apprehended any more that gods
And heroes,—fire, must glow forth, guard the ground
Where prone, by sober day-dawn, corpse-like lay
Powerless Athenai, late predominant
Lady of Hellas,—Sparté's slave-prize now!
Where should a menace lurk in those slack limbs?

What was to move his circumspection? Why
Demolish just Peiraios?

"Stay!" bade he:
"Already promise-breakers? True to type,
Athenians! past and present and to come—
The fickle and the false! No stone dislodged,
No implement applied, yet three days' grace
Expire! Forbearance is no longer-lived.
By breaking promise, terms of peace you break—
Too gently framed for falsehood, fickleness!
All must be reconsidered—yours the fault!"

Wherewith, he called a council of allies.
Pent-up resentment used its privilege,—
Outburst at ending: this the summed result.

"Because we would avenge no transient wrong
But an eternity of insolence,
Aggression,—folly, no disasters mend,
Pride, no reverses teach humility,—
Because too plainly were all punishment,
Such as comports with less obdurate crime,
Evadable by falsehood, fickleness—
Experience proves the true Athenian type,—
Therefore, 't is need we dig deep down into

The root of evil; lop nor bole nor branch.
Look up, look round and see, on every side,
What nurtured the rank tree to noisome fruit!
We who live hutted (so they laugh) not housed,
Build barns for temples, prize mud-monuments,
Nor show the sneering stranger aught but—men,—
Spartans take insult of Athenians just
Because they boast Akropolis to mount,
And Propulaia to make entry by,
Through a mad maze of marble arrogance
Such as you see—such as let none see more!
Abolish the detested luxury!
Leave not one stone upon another, raze
Athenai to the rock! Let hill and plain
Become a waste, a grassy pasture-ground
Where sheep may wander, grazing goats depend
From shapeless crags once columns! so at last
Shall peace inhabit there, and peace enough."

Whereon, a shout approved "Such peace bestow!"

Then did a Man of Phokis rise—O heart!
Rise—when no bolt of Zeus disparted sky,
No omen-bird from Pallas scared the crew,
Rise—when mere human argument could stem
No foam-fringe of the passion surging fierce,

Baffle no wrath-wave that o'er barrier broke—
Who was the Man of Phokis rose and flung
A flower i' the way of that fierce foot's advance,
Which—stop for?—nay, had stamped down sword's assault!
Could it be *He* stayed Sparté with the snatch
"Daughter of Agamemnon, late my liege,
Elektra, palaced once, a visitant
To thy poor rustic dwelling, now I come?"

Ay, facing fury of revenge, and lust
Of hate, and malice moaning to appease
Hunger on prey presumptuous, prostrate now—
Full in the hideous faces—last resource,
You flung that choric flower, my Euthukles!

And see, as through some pinhole, should the wind
Wedgingly pierce but once, in with a rush
Hurries the whole wild weather, rends to rags
The weak sail stretched against the outside storm—
So did the power of that triumphant play
Pour in, and oversweep the assembled foe!
Triumphant play, wherein our poet first
Dared bring the grandeur of the Tragic Two
Down to the level of our common life,
Close to the beating of our common heart.

Elektra? 'T was Athenai, Sparté's ice
Thawed to, while that sad portraiture appealed—
Agamemnonian lady, lost by fault
Of her own kindred, cast from house and home,
Despoiled of all the brave inheritance,
Dowered humbly as befits a herdsman's mate,
Partaker of his cottage, clothed in rags,
Patient performer of the poorest chares,
Yet mindful, all the while, of glory past
When she walked darling of Mukenai, dear
Beyond Orestes to the King of Men!

So, because Greeks are Greeks, though Sparté's brood,
And hearts are hearts, though in Lusandros' breast,
And poetry is power, and Euthukles
Had faith therein to, full-face, fling the same—
Sudden, the ice-thaw! The assembled foe,
Heaving and swaying with strange friendliness,
Cried "Reverence Elektra!"—cried "Abstain
Like that chaste Herdsman, nor dare violate
The sanctity of such reverse! Let stand
Athenai!"

Mindful of that story's close,
Perchance, and how,—when he, the Herdsman chaste,
Needs apprehend no break of tranquil sleep,—

All in due time, a stranger, dark, disguised,
Knocks at the door: with searching glance, notes keen,
Knows quick, through mean attire and disrespect,
The ravaged princess! Ay, right on, the clutch
Of guiding retribution has in charge
The author of the outrage! While one hand,
Elektra's, pulls the door behind, made fast
On fate,—the other strains, prepared to push
The victim-queen, should she make frightened pause
Before that serpentining blood which steals
Out of the darkness where, a pace beyond,
Above the slain Aigisthos, bides his blow
Dreadful Orestes!

Klutaimnestra, wise
This time, forbore; Elektra held her own;
Saved was Athenai through Euripides,
Through Euthukles, through—more than ever—me,
Balaustion, me, who, Wild-pomegranate-flower,
Felt my fruit triumph, and fade proudly so!

But next day, as ungracious minds are wont,
The Spartan, late surprised into a grace,
Grew sudden sober at the enormity,
And grudged, by daybreak, midnight's easy gift;
Splenetically must repay its cost
By due increase of rigour, doglike snatch

At aught still left dog to concede like man.
Rough sea, at flow of tide, may lip, perchance,
Smoothly the land-line reached as for repose—
Lie indolent in all unquestioned sway;
But ebbing, when needs must, all thwart and loth,
Sea claws at sand relinquished strugglingly.
So, harsh Lusandros—pinioned to inflict
The lesser penalty alone—spoke harsh,
As minded to embitter scathe by scorn.

"Athenai's self be saved then, thank the Lyre!
If Tragedy withdraws her presence—quick,
If Comedy replace her,—what more just?
Let Comedy do service, frisk away,
Dance off stage these indomitable stones,
Long Walls, Peiraian bulwarks! Hew and heave,
Pick at, pound into dust each dear defence!
Not to the Kommos—*elelelelеu*
With breast bethumped, as Tragic lyre prefers,
But Comedy shall sound the flute, and crow
At kordax-end—the hearty slapping-dance!
Collect those flute-girls—trash who flattered ear
With whistlings and fed eye with caper-cuts
While we Lakonians supped black broth or crunched
Sea-urchin, conchs and all, unpricked—coarse brutes!
Command they lead off step, time steady stroke

To spade and pickaxe, till demolished lie
Athenai's pride in powder!"

Done that day—
That sixteenth famed day of Munuchion-month!
The day when Hellas fought at Salamis,
The very day Euripides was born,
Those flute-girls—Phaps-Elaphion at their head—
Did blow their best, did dance their worst, the while
Sparté pulled down the walls, wrecked wide the works,
Laid low each merest molehill of defence,
And so the Power, Athenai, passed away!

We would not see its passing. Ere I knew
The issue of their counsels,—crouching low
And shrouded by my peplos,—I conceived,
Despite the shut eyes, the stopped ears,—by count
Only of heart-beats, telling the slow time,—
Athenai's doom was signed and signified
In that assembly,—ay, but knew there watched
One who would dare and do, nor bate at all
The stranger's licensed duty,—speak the word
Allowed the Man from Phokis! Nought remained
But urge departure, flee the sights and sounds,
Hideous exultings, wailings worth contempt,
And press to other earth, new heaven, by sea

That somehow ever prompts to 'scape despair.

Help rose to heart's wish; at the harbour-side,
The old grey mariner did reverence
To who had saved his ship, still weather-tight
As when with prow gay-garlanded she praised
The hospitable port and pushed to sea.
"Convoy Balaustion back to Rhodes, for sake
Of her and her Euripides!" laughed he.

Rhodes,—shall it not be there, my Euthukles,
Till this brief trouble of a life-time end,
That solitude—two make so populous!—
For food finds memories of the past suffice,
May be, anticipations,—hope so swells,—
Of some great future we, familiar once
With who so taught, should hail and entertain?
He lies now in the little valley, laughed
And moaned about by those mysterious streams,
Boiling and freezing, like the love and hate
Which helped or harmed him through his earthly course.
They mix in Arethousa by his grave.
The warm spring, traveller, dip thine arms into,
Brighten thy brow with! Life detests black cold.

I sent the tablets, the psalterion, so

Rewarded Sicily; the tyrant there
Bestowed them worthily in Phoibos' shrine.
A gold-graved writing tells—"I also loved
The poet, Free Athenai cheaply prized—
King Dionusios,—Archelaos-like!"

And see if young Philemon,—sure one day
To do good service and be loved himself,—
If he too have not made a votive verse!
"Grant, in good sooth, our great dead, all the same,
Retain their sense, as certain wise men say,
I 'd hang myself—to see Euripides!"
Hands off, Philemon! nowise hang thyself,
But pen the prime plays, labour the right life,
And die at good old age as grand men use,—
Keeping thee, with that great thought, warm the while,—
That he does live, Philemon! Ay, most sure!
"He lives!" hark,—waves say, winds sing out the same,
And yonder dares the citied ridge of Rhodes
Its headlong plunge from sky to sea, disparts
North bay from south,—each guarded calm, that guest
May enter gladly, blow what wind there will,—
Boiled round with breakers, to no other cry!
All in one choros,—what the master-word
They take up?—hark! "There are no gods, no gods!
Glory to God—who saves Euripides!"

THE AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS.

May I be permitted to chat a little, by way of recreation, at the end of a somewhat toilsome and perhaps fruitless adventure?

If, because of the immense fame of the following Tragedy, I wished to acquaint myself with it, and could only do so by the help of a translator, I should require him to be literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our language. The use of certain allowable constructions which, happening to be out of daily favour, are all the more appropriate to archaic workmanship, is no violence: but I would be tolerant for once,—in the case of so immensely famous an original,—of even a clumsy attempt to furnish me with the very turn of each phrase in as Greek a fashion as English will bear: while, with respect to amplifications and embellishments,—anything rather than, with the good farmer, experience that most signal of mortifications, "to gape for Æschylus and

get Theognis." I should especially decline,—what may appear to brighten up a passage,—the employment of a new word for some old one—πόνος, or μέγας, or τέλος, with its congeners, recurring four times in three lines: for though such substitution may be in itself perfectly justifiable, yet this exercise of ingenuity ought to be within the competence of the unaided English reader if he likes to show himself ingenious. Learning Greek teaches Greek, and nothing else: certainly not common sense, if that have failed to precede the teaching. Further,—if I obtained a mere strict bald version of thing by thing, or at least word pregnant with thing, I should hardly look for an impossible transmission of the reputed magniloquence and sonority of the Greek; and this with the less regret, inasmuch as there is abundant musicality elsewhere, but nowhere else than in his poem the ideas of the poet. And lastly, when presented with these ideas, I should expect the result to prove very hard reading indeed if it were meant to resemble Æschylus, ξυμβαλειν οὐ ῥᾴδιος, "not easy to understand," in the opinion of his stoutest advocate among the ancients; while, I suppose, even modern scholarship sympathizes with that early declaration of the redoubtable Salmasius,

when, looking about for an example of the truly obscure for the benefit of those who found obscurity in the sacred books, he protested that this particular play leaves them all behind in this respect, with their "Hebraisms, Syriasms, Hellenisms, and the whole of such bag and baggage."[1] For, over and above the purposed ambiguity of the Chorus, the text is sadly corrupt, probably interpolated, and certainly mutilated; and no unlearned person enjoys the scholar's privilege of trying his fancy upon each obstacle whenever he comes to a stoppage, and effectually clearing the way by suppressing what seems to lie in it.

All I can say for the present performance is, that I have done as I would be done by, if need were. Should anybody, without need, honour my translation by a comparison with the original, I beg him to observe that, following no editor exclusively, I keep to the earlier readings so long as sense can be made out of them, but disregard, I hope, little of importance in recent criticism

[1] "Quis Æschylum possit affirmare Græce nunc scienti magis patere explicabilem quam Evangelia aut Epistolas Apostolicas? Unus ejus Agamemnon obscuritate superat quantum est librorum sacrorum cum suis Hebraismis et Syriasmis et tota Hellenisticæ supellectili vel farragine."

SALMASIUS *de Hellenistica*, Epist. Dedic.

so far as I have fallen in with it. Fortunately, the poorest translation, provided only it be faithful,—though it reproduce all the artistic confusion of tenses, moods, and persons, with which the original teems,—will not only suffice to display what an eloquent friend maintains to be the all-in-all of poetry—"the action of the piece"—but may help to illustrate his assurance that "the Greeks are the highest models of expression, the unapproached masters of the grand style: their expression is so excellent because it is so admirably kept in its right degree of prominence, because it is so simple and so well subordinated, because it draws its force directly from the pregnancy of the matter which it conveys . . . not a word wasted, not a sentiment capriciously thrown in, stroke on stroke!"[1] So may all happen!

Just a word more on the subject of my spelling—in a transcript from the Greek and there exclusively—Greek names and places precisely as does the Greek author. I began this practice, with great innocency of intention, some six-and-thirty years ago. Leigh Hunt, I remember, was accustomed to speak of his gratitude, when ignorant of Greek, to those writers (like Goldsmith) who had

[1] *Poems by Matthew Arnold*, Preface.

obliged him by using English characters, so that he might relish, for instance, the smooth quality of such a phrase as "hapalunetai galené;" he said also that Shelley was indignant at "Firenze" having displaced the Dantesque "Fiorenza," and would contemptuously English the intruder "Firence." I supposed I was doing a simple thing enough: but there has been till lately much astonishment at *os* and *us*, *ai* and *oi*, representing the same letters in Greek. Of a sudden, however, whether in translation or out of it, everybody seems committing the offence, although the adoption of *u* for *v* still presents such difficulty that it is a wonder how we have hitherto escaped "Eyripides." But there existed a sturdy Briton who, Ben Jonson informs us, wrote "The Life of the Emperor Anthony Pie"—whom we now acquiesce in as Antoninus Pius: for "with time and patience the mulberry leaf becomes satin." Yet there is, on all sides, much profession of respect for what Keats called "vowelled Greek"—"consonanted," one would expect; and, in a criticism upon a late admirable translation of something of my own, it was deplored that, in a certain verse corresponding in measure to the fourteenth of the sixth Pythian Ode, "neither Professor Jebb in his Greek, nor

Mr. Browning in his English, could emulate that matchlessly musical *γόνον ἰδὼν κάλλιστον ἀνδρῶν.*" Now, undoubtedly, "Seeing her son the fairest of men" has more sense than sound to boast of: but then, would not an Italian roll us out "Rimirando il figliuolo bellissimo degli uomini!" whereat Pindar, no less than Professor Jebb and Mr. Browning, *τριακτῆρος οἴχεται τυχών.*

It is recorded in the annals of Art [1] that there was once upon a time, practising so far north as Stockholm, a painter and picture-cleaner—sire of a less unhappy son—Old Muytens: and the annalist, Baron de Tessé, has not concealed his profound dissatisfaction at Old Muytens' conceit "to have himself had something to do with the work of whatever master of eminence might pass through his hands." Whence it was,—the Baron goes on to deplore,—that much detriment was done to that excellent piece "The Recognition of Achilles," by Rubens, through the perversity of Old Muytens, "who must needs take on him to beautify every nymph of the twenty by the bestowment of a widened eye and an enlarged mouth." I, at least, have left eyes and mouths everywhere as I found them, and this conservatism is all that claims praise for—

[1] *Lettres à un jeune Prince*, traduites du Suédois.

what is, after all, ἀκέλευστος ἄμισθος ἀοιδά. No, neither "uncommanded" nor "unrewarded:" since it was commanded of me by my venerated friend Thomas Carlyle, and rewarded will it indeed become if I am permitted to dignify it by the prefatory insertion of his dear and noble name.

R. B.

LONDON: *October 1st*, 1877.

PERSONS.

Warder.

Choros of Old Men.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

TALTHUBIOS, *Herald.*

AGAMEMNON.

KASSANDRA.

AIGISTHOS.

THE AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS.

1877.

WARDER.

The gods I ask deliverance from these labours,
Watch of a year's length whereby, slumbering through it
On the Atreidai's roofs on elbow,—dog-like—
I know of nightly star-groups the assemblage,
And those that bring to men winter and summer
Bright dynasts, as they pride them in the æther
—Stars, when they wither, and the uprisings of them.
And now on ward I wait the torch's token,
The glow of fire, shall bring from Troia message
And word of capture: so prevails audacious
The man's-way-planning hoping heart of woman.
But when I, driven from night-rest, dew-drenched hold to
This couch of mine—not looked upon by visions,
Since fear instead of sleep still stands beside me,
So as that fast I fix in sleep no eyelids—
And when to sing or chirp a tune I fancy,

For slumber such song-remedy infusing,
I wail then, for this House's fortune groaning,
Not, as of old, after the best ways governed.
Now, lucky be deliverance from these labours,
At good news—the appearing dusky fire!
O hail, thou lamp of night, a day-long lightness
Revealing, and of dances the ordainment!
Halloo, halloo!
To Agamemnon's wife I show, by shouting,
That, from bed starting up at once, i' the household
Joyous acclaim, good-omened to this torch-blaze.
She send aloft, if haply Ilion's city
Be taken, as the beacon boasts announcing.
Ay, and, for me, myself will dance a prelude,
For, that my masters' dice drop right, I 'll reckon:
Since thrice-six has it thrown to me, this signal.
Well, may it hap that, as he comes, the loved hand
O' the household's lord I may sustain with this hand!
As for the rest, I 'm mute: on tongue a big ox
Has trodden. Yet this House, if voice it take should,
Most plain would speak. So, willing I myself speak
To those who know: to who know not—I 'm blankness.

CHOROS.

The tenth year this, since Priamos' great match,
King Menelaos, Agamemnon King,

—The strenuous yoke-pair of the Atreidai's honour
Two-throned, two-sceptred, whereof Zeus was donor—
Did from this land the aid, the armament despatch,
The thousand-sailored force of Argives clamouring
"Ares" from out the indignant breast, as fling
Passion forth vultures which, because of grief
Away,—as are their young ones,—with the thief,
Lofty above their brood-nests wheel in ring,
Row round and round with oar of either wing,
Lament the bedded chicks, lost labour that was love:
Which hearing, one above
—Whether Apollon, Pan or Zeus—that wail,
Sharp-piercing bird-shriek of the guests who fare
Housemates with gods in air—
Suchanone sends, against who these assail,
What, late-sent, shall not fail
Of punishing—Erinus. Here as there,
The Guardian of the Guest, Zeus, the excelling one,
Sends against Alexandros either son
Of Atreus: for that wife, the many-husbanded,
Appointing many a tug that tries the limb,
While the knee plays the prop in dust, while, shred
To morsels, lies the spear-shaft; in those grim
Marriage-prolusions when their Fury wed
Danaoi and Troes, both alike. All 's said:
Things are where things are, and, as fate has willed,

So shall they be fulfilled.
Not gently-grieving, not just doling out
The drops of expiation—no, nor tears distilled—
Shall he we know of bring the hard about
To soft—that intense ire
At those mock rites unsanctified by fire.
But we pay nought here: through our flesh, age-weighed,
Left out from who gave aid
In that day,—we remain,
Staying on staves a strength
The equal of a child's at length.
For when young marrow in the breast doth reign,
That 's the old man's match,—Ares out of place
In either: but in oldest age's case,
Foliage a-fading, why, he wends his way
On three feet, and, no stronger than a child,
Wanders about gone wild,
A dream in day.

But thou, Tundareus' daughter, Klutaimnestra queen,
What need? What new? What having heard or seen,
By what announcement's tidings, everywhere
Settest thou, round about, the sacrifice a-flare?
For, of all gods the city-swaying,
Those supernal, those infernal,
Those of the fields', those of the mart's obeying,—

The altars blaze with gifts ;
And here and there, heaven-high the torch uplifts
Flame—medicated with persuasions mild,
With foul admixture unbeguiled—
Of holy unguent, from the clotted chrism
Brought from the palace, safe in its abysm.
Of these things, speaking what may be indeed
Both possible and lawful to concede,
Healer do thou become !—of this solicitude
Which, now, stands plainly forth of evil mood,
And, then . . . but from oblations, hope, to-day
Gracious appearing, wards away
From soul the insatiate care,
The sorrow at my breast, devouring there !

Empowered am I to sing
The omens, what their force which, journeying,
Rejoiced the potentates :
(For still, from God, inflates
My breast song-suasion : age,
Born to the business, still such war can wage)
—How the fierce bird against the Teukris land
Despatched, with spear and executing hand,
The Achaian's two-throned empery—o'er Hellas' youth
Two rulers with one mind :
The birds' king to these kings of ships, on high,

—The black sort, and the sort that 's white behind,—
Appearing by the palace, on the spear-throw side,
In right sky-regions, visible far and wide,—
Devouring a hare-creature, great with young,
Baulked of more racings they, as she from whom they sprung!
Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail!
But may the good prevail!

The prudent army-prophet seeing two
The Atreidai, two their tempers, knew
Those feasting on the hare
The armament-conductors were;
And thus he spoke, explaining signs in view.
"In time, this outset takes the town of Priamos:
But all before its towers,—the people's wealth that was,
Of flocks and herds,—as sure, shall booty-sharing thence
Drain to the dregs away, by battle violence.
Only, have care lest grudge of any god disturb
With cloud the unsullied shine of that great force, the curb
Of Troia, struck with damp
Beforehand in the camp!
For envyingly is
The virgin Artemis
Toward—her father's flying hounds—this House—
The sacrificers of the piteous

And cowering beast,
Brood and all, ere the birth: she hates the eagles' feast.
Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail!
But may the good prevail!

"Thus ready is the beauteous one with help
To those small dewdrop-things fierce lions whelp,
And udder-loving litter of each brute
That roams the mead; and therefore makes she suit,
The fair one, for fulfilment to the end
Of things these signs portend—
Which partly smile, indeed, but partly scowl—
The phantasms of the fowl.
I call Ieïos Paian to avert
She work the Danaoi hurt
By any thwarting waftures, long and fast
Holdings from sail of ships:
And sacrifice, another than the last,
She for herself precipitate—
Something unlawful, feast for no man's lips,
Builder of quarrels, with the House cognate—
Having in awe no husband: for remains
A frightful, backward-darting in the path,
Wily house-keeping chronicler of wrath,
That has to punish that old children's fate!"
Such things did Kalchas,—with abundant gains

As well,—vociferate,
Predictions from the birds, in journeying,
Above the abode of either king.
With these, symphonious, sing—
Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail!
But may the good prevail!

Zeus, whosoe'er he be,—if that express
Aught dear to him on whom I call—
So do I him address.
I cannot liken out, by all
Admeasurement of powers,
Any but Zeus for refuge at such hours,
If veritably needs I must
From off my soul its vague care-burthen thrust.

Not—whosoever was the great of yore,
Bursting to bloom with bravery all round—
Is in our mouths: he was, but is no more.
And who it was that after came to be,
Met the thrice-throwing wrestler,—he
Is also gone to ground.
But "Zeus"—if any, heart and soul, that name—
Shouting the triumph-praise—proclaim,
Complete in judgment shall that man be found,
Zeus, who leads onward mortals to be wise,

Appoints that suffering masterfully teach.
In sleep, before the heart of each,
A woe-remembering travail sheds in dew
Discretion,—ay, and melts the unwilling too
By what, perchance, may be a graciousness
Of gods, enforced no less,—
As they, commanders of the crew,
Assume the awful seat.

And then the old leader of the Achaian fleet,
Disparaging no seer—
With bated breath to suit misfortune's inrush here
—(What time it laboured, that Achaian host,
By stay from sailing,—every pulse at length
Emptied of vital strength,—
Hard over Kalchis shore-bound, current-crost
In Aulis station,—while the winds which post
From Strumon, ill-delayers, famine-fraught,
Tempters of man to sail where harbourage is naught,
Spendthrifts of ships and cables, turning time
To twice the length,—these carded, by delay,
To less and less away
The Argeians' flowery prime:
And when a remedy more grave and grand
Than aught before,—yea, for the storm and dearth,—
The prophet to the foremost in command

Shrieked forth, as cause of this
Adducing Artemis,
So that the Atreidai striking staves on earth
Could not withhold the tear)—
Then did the king, the elder, speak this clear.

"Heavy the fate, indeed,—to disobey!
Yet heavy if my child I slay,
The adornment of my household: with the tide
Of virgin-slaughter, at the altar-side,
A father's hands defiling: which the way
Without its evils, say?
How shall I turn fleet-fugitive,
Failing of duty to allies?
Since for a wind-abating sacrifice
And virgin blood,—'t is right they strive,
Nay, madden with desire.
Well may it work them—this that they require!"

But when he underwent necessity's
Yoke-trace,—from soul blowing unhallowed change
Unclean, abominable,—thence—another man—
The audacious mind of him began
Its wildest range.
For this it is gives mortals hardihood—
Some vice-devising miserable mood

Of madness, and first woe of all the brood.
The sacrificer of his daughter—strange!—
He dared become, to expedite
Woman-avenging warfare,—anchors weighed
With such prelusive rite!

Prayings and callings "Father"—naught they made
Of these, and of the virgin-age,—
Captains heart-set on war to wage!
His ministrants, vows done, the father bade—
Kid-like, above the altar, swathed in pall,
Take her—lift high, and have no fear at all,
Head-downward, and the fair mouth's guard
And frontage hold,—press hard
From utterance a curse against the House
By dint of bit—violence bridling speech.
And as to ground her saffron-vest she shed,
She smote the sacrificers all and each
With arrow sweet and piteous,
From the eye only sped,—
Significant of will to use a word,
Just as in pictures: since, full many a time,
In her sire's guest-hall, by the well-heaped board
Had she made music,—lovingly with chime
Of her chaste voice, that unpolluted thing,
Honoured the third libation,—paian that should bring

Good fortune to the sire she loved so well.

What followed—those things I nor saw nor tell.
But Kalchas' arts,—whate'er they indicate,—
Miss of fulfilment never: it is fate.
True, justice makes, in sufferers, a desire
To know the future woe preponderate.
But—hear before is need?
To that, farewell and welcome! 't is the same, indeed,
As grief beforehand: clearly, part for part,
Conformably to Kalchas' art,
Shall come the event.
But be they as they may, things subsequent,—
What is to do, prosperity betide
E'en as we wish it!—we, the next allied,
Sole guarding barrier of the Apian land.

I am come, reverencing power in thee,
O Klutaimnestra! For 't is just we bow
To the ruler's wife,—the male-seat man-bereaved.
But if thou, having heard good news,—or none,—
For good news' hope dost sacrifice thus wide,
I would hear gladly: art thou mute,—no grudge!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Good-news-announcer, may—as is the by-word—

Morn become, truly,—news from Night his mother!
But thou shalt learn joy past all hope of hearing.
Priamos' city have the Argeioi taken.

CHOROS.

How sayest? The word, from want of faith, escaped me.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Troia the Achaioi hold: do I speak plainly?

CHOROS.

Joy overcreeps me, calling forth the tear-drop.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Right! for, that glad thou art, thine eye convicts thee.

CHOROS.

For—what to thee, of all this, trusty token?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

What 's here! how else? unless the god have cheated.

CHOROS.

Haply thou flattering shows of dreams respectest?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

No fancy would I take of soul sleep-burthened.

CHOROS.

But has there puffed thee up some unwinged omen?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

As a young maid's my mind thou mockest grossly.

CHOROS.

Well, at what time was—even sacked, the city?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Of this same mother Night—the dawn, I tell thee.

CHOROS.

And who of messengers could reach this swiftness?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Hephaistos—sending a bright blaze from Ide.
Beacon did beacon send, from fire the poster,
Hitherward: Ide to the rock Hermaian
Of Lemnos: and a third great torch o' the island

Zeus' seat received in turn, the Athoan summit.
And,—so upsoaring as to stride sea over,
The strong lamp-voyager, and all for joyance—
Did the gold-glorious splendour, any sun like,
Pass on—the pine-tree—to Makistos' watch-place;
Who did not,—tardy,—caught, no wits about him,
By sleep,—decline his portion of the missive.
And far the beacon's light, on stream Euripos
Arriving, made aware Messapios' warders,
And up they lit in turn, played herald onwards,
Kindling with flame a heap of grey old heather.
And, strengthening still, the lamp, decaying nowise,
Springing o'er Plain Asopos,—full-moon-fashion
Effulgent,—toward the crag of Mount Kithairon,
Roused a new rendering-up of fire the escort—
And light, far escort, lacked no recognition
O' the guard—as burning more than burnings told you
And over Lake Gorgopis light went leaping,
And, at Mount Aigiplanktos safe arriving,
Enforced the law—"to never stint the fire-stuff."
And they send, lighting up with ungrudged vigour,
Of flame a huge beard, ay, the very foreland
So as to strike above, in burning onward,
The look-out which commands the Strait Saronic.
Then did it dart until it reached the outpost
Mount Arachnaios here, the city's neighbour;

And then darts to this roof of the Atreidai
This light of Ide's fire not unforefathered!
Such are the rules prescribed the flambeau-bearers:
He beats that 's first and also last in running.
Such is the proof and token I declare thee,
My husband having sent me news from Troia.

CHOROS.

The gods, indeed, anon will I pray, woman!
But now, these words to hear, and sate my wonder
Thoroughly, I am fain—if twice thou tell them.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Troia do the Achaioi hold, this same day.
I think a noise—no mixture—reigns i' the city.
Sour wine and unguent pour thou in one vessel—
Standers-apart, not lovers, wouldst thou style them:
And so, of captives and of conquerors, partwise
The voices are to hear, of fortune diverse.
For those, indeed, upon the bodies prostrate
Of husbands, brothers, children upon parents
—The old men, from a throat that 's free no longer,
Shriekingly wail the death-doom of their dearest:
While these—the after-battle hungry labour,
Which prompts night-faring, marshals them to breakfast

On the town's store, according to no billet
Of sharing, but as each drew lot of fortune.
In the spear-captured Troic habitations
House they already: from the frosts upæthral
And dews delivered, will they, luckless creatures,
Without a watch to keep, slumber all night through.
And if they fear the gods, the city-guarders,
And the gods' structures of the conquered country,
They may not—capturers—soon in turn be captive.
But see no prior lust befall the army
To sack things sacred—by gain-cravings vanquished!
For there needs homeward the return's salvation,
To round the new limb back o' the double race-course.
And guilty to the gods if came the army,
Awakened up the sorrow of those slaughtered
Might be—should no outbursting evils happen.
But may good beat—no turn to see i' the balance!
For, many benefits I want the gain of.

CHOROS.

Woman, like prudent man thou kindly speakest.
And I, thus having heard thy trusty tokens,
The gods to rightly hail forthwith prepare me;
For, grace that must be paid has crowned our labours.

O Zeus the king, and friendly Night

Of these brave boons bestower—
Thou who didst fling on Troia's every tower
The o'er-roofing snare, that neither great thing might,
Nor any of the young ones, overpass
Captivity's great sweep-net—one and all
Of Ate held in thrall!
Ay, Zeus I fear—the guest's friend great—who was
The doer of this, and long since bent
The bow on Alexandros with intent
That neither wide o' the white
Nor o'er the stars the foolish dart should light.
The stroke of Zeus—they have it, as men say!
This, at least, from the source track forth we may!
As he ordained, so has he done.
"No"—said someone—
"The gods think fit to care
Nowise for mortals, such
As those by whom the good and fair
Of things denied their touch
Is trampled!" but he was profane.
That they do care, has been made plain
To offspring of the over-bold,
Outbreathing "Ares" greater than is just—
Houses that spill with more than they can hold,
More than is best for man. Be man's what must
Keep harm off, so that in himself he find

Sufficiency—the well-endowed of mind!
For there 's no bulwark in man's wealth to him
Who, through a surfeit, kicks—into the dim
And disappearing—Right's great altar.

Yes—
It urges him, the sad persuasiveness,
Ate's insufferable child that schemes
Treason beforehand: and all cure is vain.
It is not hidden: out it glares again,
A light dread-lamping-mischief, just as gleams
The badness of the bronze;
Through rubbing, puttings to the touch,
Black-clotted is he, judged at once.
He seeks—the boy—a flying bird to clutch,
The insufferable brand
Setting upon the city of his land
Whereof not any god hears prayer;
While him who brought about such evils there,
That unjust man, the god in grapple throws.
Such an one, Paris goes
Within the Atreidai's house—
Shamed the guest's board by robbery of the spouse.

And, leaving to her townsmen throngs a-spread
With shields, and spear-thrusts of sea-armament,

And bringing Ilion, in a dowry's stead,
Destruction—swiftly through the gates she went,
Daring the undareable. But many a groan outbroke
From prophets of the House as thus they spoke.
"Woe, woe the House, the House and Rulers,—woe
The marriage-bed and dints
A husband's love imprints!
There she stands silent! meets no honour—no
Shame—sweetest still to see of things gone long ago!
And, through desire of one across the main,
A ghost will seem within the house to reign:
And hateful to the husband is the grace
Of well-shaped statues: from—in place of eyes
Those blanks—all Aphrodite dies.

"But dream-appearing mournful fantasies—
There they stand, bringing grace that 's vain.
For vain 't is, when brave things one seems to view;
The fantasy has floated off, hands through;
Gone, that appearance,—nowise left to creep,—
On wings, the servants in the paths of sleep!"
Woes, then, in household and on hearth, are such
As these—and woes surpassing these by much.
But not these only: everywhere—
For those who from the land
Of Hellas issued in a band,

Sorrow, the heart must bear,
Sits in the home of each, conspicuous there.
Many a circumstance, at least,
Touches the very breast.
For those
Whom any sent away,—he knows:
And in the live man's stead,
Armour and ashes reach
The house of each.

For Ares, gold-exchanger for the dead,
And balance-holder in the fight o' the spear,
Due-weight from Ilion sends—
What moves the tear on tear—
A charred scrap to the friends:
Filling with well-packed ashes every urn,
For man—that was—the sole return.
And they groan—praising much, the while,
Now this man as experienced in the strife,
Now that, fallen nobly on a slaughtered pile,
Because of—not his own—another's wife.
But things there be, one barks,
When no man harks:
A surreptitious grief that 's grudge
Against the Atreidai who first sought the judge.
But some there, round the rampart, have

In Ilian earth, each one his grave:
All fair-formed as at birth,
It hid them—what they have and hold—the hostile
earth.

And big with anger goes the city's word,
And pays a debt by public curse incurred.
And ever with me—as about to hear
A something night-involved—remains my fear:
Since of the many-slayers—not
Unwatching are the gods.
The black Erinues, at due periods—
Whoever gains the lot
Of fortune with no right—
Him, by life's strain and stress
Back-again-beaten from success,
They strike blind: and among the out-of-sight
For who has got to be, avails no might.
The being praised outrageously
Is grave, for at the eyes of such an one
Is launched, from Zeus, the thunder-stone.
Therefore do I decide
For so much and no more prosperity
Than of his envy passes unespied.
Neither a city-sacker would I be,
Nor life, myself by others captive, see.

A swift report has gone our city through,
From fire, the good-news messenger: if true,
Who knows? Or is it not a god-sent lie?
Who is so childish and deprived of sense
That, having, at announcements of the flame
Thus novel, felt his own heart fired thereby,
He then shall at a change of evidence,
Be worsted just the same?
It is conspicuous in a woman's nature,
Before its view to take a grace for granted:
Too trustful,—on her boundary, usurpature
Is swiftly made;
But swiftly, too, decayed,
The glory perishes by woman vaunted.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Soon shall we know—of these light-bearing torches,
And beacons and exchanges, fire with fire—
If they are true, indeed, or if, dream-fashion,
This gladsome light came and deceived our judg
ment.
Yon herald from the shore I see, o'ershadowed
With boughs of olive: dust, mud's thirsty brother,
Close neighbours on his garb, thus testify me
That neither voiceless, nor yet kindling for thee

Mountain-wood-flame, shall he explain by fire-smoke:
But either tell out more the joyance, speaking. . . .
Word contrary to which, I aught but love it!
For may good be—to good that 's known—appendage!

CHOROS.

Whoever prays for aught else to this city
—May he himself reap fruit of his mind's error!

HERALD.

Ha, my forefathers' soil of earth Argeian!
Thee, in this year's tenth light, am I returned to—
Of many broken hopes, on one hope chancing;
For never prayed I, in this earth Argeian
Dying, to share my part in tomb the dearest.
Now, hail thou earth, and hail thou also, sunlight,
And Zeus, the country's lord, and king the Puthian
From bow no longer urging at us arrows!
Enough, beside Skamandros, cam'st thou adverse:
Now, contrary, be saviour thou and healer,
O king Apollon! And gods conquest-granting,
All—I invoke too, and my tutelary
Hermes, dear herald, heralds' veneration,—
And Heroes our forthsenders,—friendly, once more
The army to receive, the war-spear's leavings!

Ha, mansions of my monarchs, roofs beloved,
And awful seats, and deities sun-fronting—
Receive with pomp your monarch, long time absent!
For he comes bringing light in night-time to you,
In common with all these—king Agamemnon.
But kindly greet him—for clear shows your duty—
Who has dug under Troia with the mattock
Of Zeus the Avenger, whereby plains are out-ploughed,
Altars unrecognizable, and gods' shrines,
And the whole land's seed thoroughly has perished.
And such a yoke-strap having cast round Troia,
The elder king Atreides, happy man—he
Comes to be honoured, worthiest of what mortals
Now are. Nor Paris nor the accomplice-city
Outvaunts their deed as more than they are done-by:
For, in a suit for rape and theft found guilty,
He missed of plunder and, in one destruction,
Fatherland, house and home has mowed to atoms:
Debts the Priamidai have paid twice over.

CHOROS.

Hail, herald from the army of Achaians!

HERALD.

I hail:—to die, will gainsay gods no longer!

CHOROS.

Love of this fatherland did exercise thee?

HERALD.

So that I weep, at least, with joy, my eyes full.

CHOROS.

What, of this gracious sickness were ye gainers?

HERALD.

How now? instructed, I this speech shall master.

CHOROS.

For those who loved you back, with longing stricken.

HERALD.

This land yearned for the yearning army, say'st thou?

CHOROS.

So as to set me oft, from dark mind, groaning.

HERALD.

Whence came this ill mind--hatred to the army?

CHOROS.

Of old, I use, for mischief's physic, silence.

HERALD.

And how, the chiefs away, did you fear any?

CHOROS.

So that now,—late thy word,—much joy were—dying!

HERALD.

For well have things been worked out: these,—in much time,
Some of them, one might say, had luck in falling,
While some were faulty: since who, gods excepted,
Goes, through the whole time of his life, ungrieving?
For labours should I tell of, and bad lodgments,
Narrow deckways ill-strewn, too,—what the day's woe
We did not groan at getting for our portion?
As for land-things, again, on went more hatred!
Since beds were ours hard by the foemen's ramparts,
And, out of heaven and from the earth, the meadow
Dews kept a-sprinkle, an abiding damage
Of vestures, making hair a wild-beast matting.
Winter, too, if one told of it--bird-slaying—

Such as, unbearable, Idaian snow brought—
Or heat, when waveless, on its noontide couches
Without a wind, the sea would slumber falling
—Why must one mourn these? O'er and gone is labour:
O'er and gone is it, even to those dead ones,
So that no more again they mind uprising.
Why must we tell in numbers those deprived ones,
And the live man be vexed with fate's fresh outbreak?
Rather, I bid full farewell to misfortunes!
For us, the left from out the Argeian army,
The gain beats, nor does sorrow counterbalance.
So that 't is fitly boasted of, this sunlight,
By us, o'er sea and land the aery flyers,
"Troia at last taking, the band of Argives
Hang up such trophies to the gods of Hellas
Within their domes—new glory to grow ancient!"
Such things men having heard must praise the city
And army-leaders: and the grace which wrought them—
Of Zeus, shall honoured be. Thou hast my whole word.

CHOROS.

O'ercome by words, their sense I do not gainsay.
For, aye this breeds youth in the old—"to learn well."
But these things most the house and Klutaimnestra
Concern, 't is likely: while they make me rich, too.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

I shouted long ago, indeed, for joyance,
When came that first night-messenger of fire
Proclaiming Ilion's capture and dispersion.
And someone, girding me, said, "Through fire-bearers
Persuaded—Troia to be sacked now, thinkest?
Truly, the woman's way,—high to lift heart up!"
By such words I was made seem wit-bewildered:
Yet still I sacrificed; and,—female-song with,—
A shout one man and other, through the city,
Set up, congratulating in the gods' seats,
Soothing the incense-eating flame right fragrant.
And now, what 's more, indeed, why need'st thou tell me?
I of the king himself shall learn the whole word:
And,—as may best be,—I my revered husband
Shall hasten, as he comes back, to receive: for—
What 's to a wife sweeter to see than this light
(Her husband, by the god saved, back from warfare)
So as to open gates? This tell my husband—
To come at soonest to his loving city.
A faithful wife at home may he find, coming!
Such an one as he left—the dog o' the household—
Trusty to him, adverse to the ill-minded,
And, in all else, the same: no signet-impress
Having done harm to, in that time's duration.

I know nor pleasure, nor blameworthy converse
With any other man more than—bronze-dippings!

HERALD.

Such boast as this—brimful of the veracious—
Is, for a high-born dame, not bad to send forth!

CHOROS.

Ay, she spoke thus to thee—that hast a knowledge
From clear interpreters—a speech most seemly.
But speak thou, herald! Meneleos I ask of:
If he, returning, back in safety also
Will come with you—this land's beloved chieftain?

HERALD.

There 's no way I might say things false and pleasant
For friends to reap the fruits of through a long time.

CHOROS.

How then if, speaking good, things true thou chance on?

HERALD.

For not well-hidden things become they, sundered.
The man has vanished from the Achaic army,

He and his ship too. I announce no falsehood.

CHOROS.

Whether forth-putting openly from Ilion,
Or did storm—wide woe—snatch him from the army?

HERALD.

Like topping bowman, thou hast touched the target,
And a long sorrow hast succinctly spoken.

CHOROS.

Whether, then, of him, as a live or dead man
Was the report by other sailors bruited?

HERALD.

Nobody knows so as to tell out clearly
Excepting Helios who sustains earth's nature.

CHOROS.

How say'st thou then, did storm the naval army
Attack and end, by the celestials' anger?

HERALD.

It suits not to defile a day auspicious

With ill-announcing speech: distinct each god's due:
And when a messenger with gloomy visage
To a city bears a fall'n host's woes—God ward off!—
One popular wound that happens to the city,
And many sacrificed from many households—
Men, scourged by that two-thonged whip Ares loves so,
Double spear-headed curse, bloody yoke-couple,—
Of woes like these, doubtless, whoe'er comes weighted,
Him does it suit to sing the Erinues' paian.
But who, of matters saved a glad-news-bringer,
Comes to a city in good estate rejoicing. . . .
How shall I mix good things with evil, telling
Of storm against the Achaioi, urged by gods' wrath?
For they swore league, being arch-foes before that,
Fire and the sea: and plighted troth approved they,
Destroying the unhappy Argeian army.
At night began the bad-wave-outbreak evils;
For, ships against each other Threkian breezes
Shattered: and these, butted at in a fury
By storm and typhoon, with surge rain-resounding,—
Off they went, vanished, thro' a bad herd's whirling.
And, when returned the brilliant light of Helios,
We view the Aigaian sea on flower with corpses
Of men Achaian and with naval ravage.
But us indeed, and ship, unhurt i' the hull too,
Either someone outstole us or outprayed us—

Some god—no man it was the tiller touching.
And Fortune, saviour, willing on our ship sat.
So as it neither had in harbour wave-surge
Nor ran aground against a shore all rocky.
And then, the water-Haides having fled from
In the white day, not trusting to our fortune,
We chewed the cud in thoughts—this novel sorrow
O' the army labouring and badly pounded.
And now—if anyone of them is breathing—
They talk of us as having perished: why not?
And we—that they the same fate have, imagine.
May it be for the best! Meneleos, then,
Foremost and specially to come, expect thou!
If (that is) any ray o' the sun reports him
Living and seeing too—by Zeus' contrivings,
Not yet disposed to quite destroy the lineage—
Some hope is he shall come again to household.
Having heard such things, know, thou truth art hearing!

CHOROS.

Who may he have been that named thus wholly with exactitude—
(Was he someone whom we see not, by forecastings of the future
Guiding tongue in happy mood?)

—Her with battle for a bridegroom, on all sides contention-wooed,
Helena? Since—mark the suture!—
Ship's-Hell, Man's-Hell, City's-Hell,
From the delicately-pompous curtains that pavilion well,
Forth, by favour of the gale
Of earth-born Zephuros did she sail.
Many shield-bearers, leaders of the pack,
Sailed too upon their track,
Theirs who had directed oar,
Then visible no more,
To Simois' leaf-luxuriant shore—
For sake of strife all gore!

To Ilion Wrath, fulfilling her intent,
This marriage-care—the rightly named so—sent:
In after-time, for the tables' abuse
And that of the hearth-partaker Zeus,
Bringing to punishment
Those who honoured with noisy throat
The honour of the bride, the hymenæal note
Which did the kinsfolk then to singing urge.
But, learning a new hymn for that which was,
The ancient city of Priamos
Groans probably a great and general dirge,
Denominating Paris

"The man that miserably marries:"—
She who, all the while before,
A life, that was a general dirge
For citizens' unhappy slaughter, bore.

And thus a man, by no milk's help,
Within his household reared a lion's whelp
That loved the teat
In life's first festal stage:
Gentle as yet,
A true child-lover, and, to men of age,
A thing whereat pride warms;
And oft he had it in his arms
Like any new-born babe, bright-faced, to hand
Wagging its tail, at belly's strict command.

But in due time upgrown,
The custom of progenitors was shown:
For—thanks for sustenance repaying
With ravage of sheep slaughtered—
It made unbidden feast;
With blood the house was watered,
To household came a woe there was no staying:
Great mischief many-slaying!
From God it was—some priest
Of Até, in the house, by nurture thus increased.

At first, then, to the city of Ilion went
A soul, as I might say, of windless calm—
Wealth's quiet ornament,
An eyes'-dart bearing balm,
Love's spirit-biting flower.
But—from the true course bending—
She brought about, of marriage, bitter ending:
Ill-resident, ill-mate, in power
Passing to the Priamidai—by sending
Of Hospitable Zeus—
Erinus for a bride,—to make brides mourn, her dower.

Spoken long ago
Was the ancient saying
Still among mortals staying:
"Man's great prosperity at height of rise
Engenders offspring nor unchilded dies;
And, from good fortune, to such families,
Buds forth insatiate woe."
Whereas, distinct from any,
Of my own mind I am:
For 't is the unholy deed begets the many,
Resembling each its dam.
Of households that correctly estimate,
Ever a beauteous child is born of Fate.

But ancient Arrogance delights to generate
Arrogance, young and strong mid mortals' sorrow,
Or now, or then, when comes the appointed morrow.
And she bears young Satiety;
And, fiend with whom nor fight nor war can be,
Unholy Daring—twin black Curses
Within the household, children like their nurses.

But Justice shines in smoke-grimed habitations,
And honours the well-omened life;
While,—gold-besprinkled stations
Where the hands' filth is rife,
With backward-turning eyes
Leaving,—to holy seats she hies,
Not worshipping the power of wealth
Stamped with applause by stealth:
And to its end directs each thing begun.

Approach then, my monarch, of Troia the sacker, of Atreus the son!
How ought I address thee, how ought I revere thee,—nor yet overhitting
Nor yet underbending the grace that is fitting?
Many of mortals hasten to honour the seeming-to-be—
Passing by justice: and, with the ill-faring, to groan as he groans all are free.

But no bite of the sorrow their liver has reached to:
They say with the joyful,—one outside on each, too,
As they force to a smile smileless faces.
But whoever is good at distinguishing races
In sheep of his flock—it is not for the eyes
Of a man to escape such a shepherd's surprise,
As they seem, from a well-wishing mind,
In watery friendship to fawn and be kind.
Thou to me, then, indeed, sending an army for Helena's sake,
(I will not conceal it) wast—oh, by no help of the Muses!—depicted
Not well of thy midriff the rudder directing,—convicted
Of bringing a boldness they did not desire to the men with existence at stake.
But now—from no outside of mind, nor unlovingly—gracious thou art
To those who have ended the labour, fulfilling their part;
And in time shalt thou know, by inquiry instructed,
Who of citizens justly, and who not to purpose, the city conducted.

AGAMEMNON.

First, indeed, Argos, and the gods, the local,
'T is right addressing—those with me the partners

In this return and right things done the city
Of Priamos: gods who, from no tongue hearing
The rights o' the cause, for Ilion's fate man-slaught'rous
Into the bloody vase, not oscillating,
Put the vote-pebbles, while, o' the rival vessel,
Hope rose up to the lip-edge: filled it was not.
By smoke the captured city is still conspicuous:
Até's burnt offerings live: and, dying with them,
The ash sends forth the fulsome blasts of riches.
Of these things, to the gods grace many-mindful
'T is right I render, since both nets outrageous
We built them round with, and, for sake of woman,
It did the city to dust—the Argeian monster,
The horse's nestling, the shield-bearing people
That made a leap, at setting of the Pleiads,
And, vaulting o'er the tower, the raw-flesh-feeding
Lion licked up his fill of blood tyrannic.
I to the gods indeed prolonged this preface;
But—as for *thy* thought, I remember hearing—
I say the same, and thou co-pleader hast me.
Since few of men this faculty is born with—
To honour, without grudge, their friend, successful.
For moody, on the heart, a poison seated
Its burthen doubles to who gained the sickness:
By his own griefs he is himself made heavy,
And out-of-door prosperity seeing groans at.

Knowing, I 'd call (for well have I experienced)
" Fellowship's mirror," " phantom of a shadow,"
Those seeming to be mighty gracious to me:
While just Odusseus—he who sailed not willing—
When joined on, was to me the ready trace-horse.
This of him, whether dead or whether living,
I say. For other city-and-gods' concernment—
Appointing common courts, in full assemblage
We will consult. And as for what holds seemly—
How it may lasting stay well, must be counselled:
While what has need of medicines Paionian
We, either burning or else cutting kindly,
Will make endeavour to turn pain from sickness.
And now into the domes and homes by altar
Going, I to the gods first raise the right-hand—
They who, far sending, back again have brought me.
And Victory, since she followed, fixed remain she!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Men, citizens, Argeians here, my worships!
I shall not shame me, consort-loving manners
To tell before you: for in time there dies off
The diffidence from people. Not from others
Learning, I of myself will tell the hard life
I bore so long as this man was 'neath Ilion.

First: for a woman, from the male divided,
To sit at home alone, is monstrous evil—
Hearing the many rumours back-revenging:
And for now This to come, now That bring after
Woe, and still worse woe, bawling in the household!
And truly, if so many wounds had chanced on
My husband here, as homeward used to dribble
Report, he 's pierced more than a net to speak of!
While, were he dying (as the words abounded)
A triple-bodied Geruon the Second,
Plenty above—for loads below I count not—
Of earth a three-share cloak he 'd boast of taking,
Once only dying in each several figure!
Because of suchlike rumours back-revenging,
Many the halters from my neck, above head,
Others than *I* loosed—loosed from neck by main force!
From this cause, sure, the boy stands not beside me—
Possessor of our troth-plights, thine and mine too—
As ought Orestes: be not thou astonished!
For, him brings up our well-disposed guest-captive
Strophios the Phokian—ills that told on both sides
To me predicting—both of thee 'neath Ilion
The danger, and if anarchy's mob-uproar
Should overthrow thy council; since 't is born with

Mortals,—whoe'er has fallen, the more to kick him.
Such an excuse, I think, no cunning carries!
As for myself—why, of my wails the rushing
Fountains are dried up: not in them a drop more!
And in my late-to-bed eyes I have damage,
Bewailing what concerned thee, those torch-holdings
For ever unattended to. In dreams—why,
Beneath the light wing-beats o' the gnat, I woke up
As he went buzzing—sorrows that concerned thee
Seeing, that filled more than their fellow-sleep-time.
Now, all this having suffered, from soul grief-free
I would style this man here the dog o' the stables,
The saviour forestay of the ship, the high roof's
Ground-prop, son sole-begotten to his father,
—Ay, land appearing to the sailors past hope,
Loveliest day to see after a tempest,
To the wayfaring-one athirst a well-spring,
—The joy, in short, of 'scaping all that 's—fatal!
I judge him worth addresses such as these are
—Envy stand off!—for many those old evils
We underwent. And now, to me—dear headship!—
Dismount thou from this car, not earthward setting
The foot of thine, O king, that's Ilion's spoiler!
Slave-maids, why tarry?—whose the task allotted
To strew the soil o' the road with carpet-spreadings.
Immediately be purple-strewn the pathway,

So that to home unhoped may lead him—Justice !
As for the rest, care shall—by no sleep conquered—
Dispose things—justly (gods to aid !) appointed.

AGAMEMNON.

Offspring of Leda, of my household warder,
Suitably to my absence hast thou spoken,
For long the speech thou didst outstretch ! But aptly
To praise—from others ought to go this favour.
And for the rest,—not me, in woman's fashion,
Mollify, nor—as mode of barbarous man is—
To me gape forth a groundward-falling clamour !
Nor, strewing it with garments, make my passage
Envied ! Gods, sure, with these behoves we honour:
But, for a mortal on these varied beauties
To walk—to me, indeed, is nowise fear-free.
I say—as man, not god, to me do homage !
Apart from foot-mats both and varied vestures,
Renown is loud, and—not to lose one's senses,
God's greatest gift. Behoves we him call happy
Who has brought life to end in loved well-being.
If all things I might manage thus—brave man, I !

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Come now, this say, nor feign a feeling to me!

AGAMEMNON.

With feeling, know indeed, I do not tamper!

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Vowed'st thou to the gods, in fear, to act thus?

AGAMEMNON.

If any, *I* well knew resolve I outspoke.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

What think'st thou Priamos had done, thus victor?

AGAMEMNON.

On varied vests—I do think—he had passaged.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Then, do not, struck with awe at human censure. . . .

AGAMEMNON.

Well, popular mob-outcry much avails too.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Ay, but the unenvied is not the much valued.

AGAMEMNON.

Sure, 't is no woman's part to long for battle.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Why, to the prosperous, even suits a beating.

AGAMEMNON.

What? thou this beating us in war dost prize too?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Persuade thee! power, for once, grant *me*—and willing!

AGAMEMNON.

But if this seem so to thee—shoes, let someone
Loose under, quick—foot's serviceable carriage!
And me, on these sea-products walking, may no
Grudge from a distance, from the god's eye, strike at!
For great shame were my strewment-spoiling—riches
Spoiling with feet, and silver-purchased textures!
Of these things, thus then. But this female-stranger
Tenderly take inside! Who conquers mildly
God, from afar, benignantly regardeth.
For, willing, no one wears a yoke that 's servile:
And she, of many valuables, outpicked

The flower, the army's gift, myself has followed.
So,—since to hear thee, I am brought about thus,—
I go into the palace—purples treading.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

There is the sea—and what man shall exhaust it?—
Feeding much purple's worth-its-weight-in-silver
Dye, ever fresh and fresh, our garments' tincture;
At home, such wealth, king, we begin—by gods' help—
With having, and to lack, the household knows not.
Of many garments had I vowed a treading
(In oracles if fore-enjoined the household)
Of this dear soul the safe-return-price scheming!
For, root existing, foliage goes up houses,
O'erspreading shadow against Seirios dog-star;
And, thou returning to the hearth domestic,
Warmth, yea, in winter dost thou show returning.
And when, too, Zeus works, from the green-grape acrid,
Wine—then, already, cool in houses cometh—
The perfect man his home perambulating!
Zeus, Zeus Perfecter, these my prayers perfect thou!
Thy care be—yea—of things thou mayst make perfect!

CHOROS.

Wherefore to me, this fear—

Groundedly stationed here
Fronting my heart, the portent-watcher—flits she?
Wherefore should prophet-play
The uncalled and unpaid lay,
Nor—having spat forth fear, like bad dreams—sits she
On the mind's throne beloved—well-suasive Boldness?
For time, since, by a throw of all the hands,
The boat's stern-cables touched the sands,
Has past from youth to oldness,—
When under Ilion rushed the ship-borne bands.

And from my eyes I learn—
Being myself my witness—their return.
Yet, all the same, without a lyre, my soul,
Itself its teacher too, chants from within
Erinus' dirge, not having now the whole
Of Hope's dear boldness: nor my inwards sin—
The heart that 's rolled in whirls against the mind
Justly presageful of a fate behind.
But I pray—things false, from my hope, may fall
Into the fate that 's not-fulfilled-at-all!

Especially at least, of health that 's great
The term 's insatiable: for, its weight
—A neighbour, with a common wall between—
Ever will sickness lean;

And destiny, her course pursuing straight,
Has struck man's ship against a reef unseen.
Now, when a portion, rather than the treasure,
Fear casts from sling, with peril in right measure,
It has not sunk—the universal freight,
(With misery freighted over-full)
Nor has fear whelmed the hull.
Then too the gift of Zeus,
Two-handedly profuse,
Even from the furrows' yield for yearly use
Has done away with famine, the disease;
But blood of man to earth once falling—deadly, black—
In times ere these,—
Who may, by singing spells, call back?
Zeus had not else stopped one who rightly knew
The way to bring the dead again.
But, did not an appointed Fate constrain
The Fate from gods, to bear no more than due,
My heart, outstripping what tongue utters,
Would have all out: which now, in darkness, mutters
Moodily grieved, nor ever hopes to find
How she a word in season may unwind
From out the enkindling mind.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Take thyself in, thou too—I say, Kassandra!

Since Zeus—not angrily—in household placed thee
Partaker of hand-sprinklings, with the many
Slaves stationed, his the Owner's altar close to.
Descend from out this car, nor be high-minded!
And truly they do say Alkmené's child once
Bore being sold, slaves' barley-bread his living.
If, then, necessity of this lot o'erbalance,
Much is the favour of old-wealthy masters:
For those who, never hoping, made fine harvest
Are harsh to slaves in all things, beyond measure.
Thou hast—with us—such usage as law warrants.

CHOROS.

To thee it was, she paused plain speech from speaking.
Being inside the fatal nets—obeying,
Thou mayst obey: but thou mayst disobey too!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Why, if she is not, in the swallow's fashion,
Possessed of voice that 's unknown and barbaric,
I, with speech—speaking in mind's scope—persuade her.

CHOROS.

Follow! The best—as things now stand—she speaks of.
Obey thou, leaving this thy car-enthronement!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Well, with this thing at door, for me no leisure
To waste time: as concerns the hearth mid-navelled,
Already stand the sheep for fireside slaying
By those who never hoped to have such favour.
If thou, then, aught of this wilt do, delay not!
But if thou, being witless, tak'st no word in,
Speak thou, instead of voice, with hand as Kars do!

CHOROS.

She seems a plain interpreter in need of,
The stranger! and her way—a beast's new-captured!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Why, she is mad, sure,—hears her own bad senses,—
Who, while she comes, leaving a town new-captured,
Yet knows not how to bear the bit o' the bridle
Before she has out-frothed her bloody fierceness.
Not I—throwing away more words—will shamed be!

CHOROS.

But I,—for I compassionate,—will chafe not.
Come, O unhappy one, this car vacating,
Yielding to this necessity, prove yoke's use!

KASSANDRA.

Ototototoi, Gods, Earth,—
Apollon, Apollon!

CHOROS.

Why didst thou "ototoi" concerning Loxias?
Since he is none such as to suit a mourner.

KASSANDRA.

Ototototoi, Gods, Earth,—
Apollon, Apollon!

CHOROS.

Ill-boding here again the god invokes she
—Nowise empowered in woes to stand by helpful.

KASSANDRA.

Apollon, Apollon,
Guard of the ways, my destroyer!
For thou hast quite, this second time, destroyed me.

CHOROS.

To prophesy she seems of her own evils:
Remains the god-gift to the slave-soul present.

KASSANDRA.

Apollon, Apollon,
Guard of the ways, my destroyer!
Ha, whither hast thou led me? to what roof now?

CHOROS.

To the Atreidai's roof: if this thou know'st not,
I tell it thee, nor this wilt thou call falsehood.

KASSANDRA.

How! How!
God-hated, then! Of many a crime it knew—
Self-slaying evils, halters too:
Man's-shambles, blood-besprinkler of the ground!

CHOROS.

She seems to be good-nosed, the stranger: dog-like,
She snuffs indeed the victims she will find there.

KASSANDRA.

How! How!
By the witnesses here I am certain now!
These children bewailing their slaughters—flesh
dressed in the fire
And devoured by their sire!

CHOROS.

Ay, we have heard of thy soothsaying glory,
Doubtless: but prophets none are we in scent of!

KASSANDRA.

Ah, gods, what ever does she meditate?
What this new anguish great?
Great in the house here she meditates ill
Such as friends cannot bear, cannot cure it: and still
Off stands all Resistance
Afar in the distance!

CHOROS.

Of these I witless am—these prophesyings.
But those I knew: for the whole city bruits them.

KASSANDRA.

Ah, unhappy one, this thou consummatest?
Thy husband, thy bed's common guest,
In the bath having brightened. . . How shall I declare
Consummation? It soon will be there:
For hand after hand she outstretches,
At life as she reaches!

CHOROS.

Nor yet I've gone with thee! for—after riddles—
Now, in blind oracles, I feel resourceless.

KASSANDRA.

Eh, eh, papai, papai,
What this, I espy?
Some net of Haides undoubtedly
Nay, rather, the snare
Is she who has share
In his bed, who takes part in the murder there!
But may a revolt—
Unceasing assault—
On the Race, raise a shout
Sacrificial, about
A victim—by stoning—
For murder atoning!

CHOROS.

What this Erinus which i' the house thou callest
To raise her cry? Not me thy word enlightens!
To my heart has run
A drop of the crocus-dye:
Which makes for those
On earth by the spear that lie.

A common close
With life's descending sun.
Swift is the curse begun!

KASSANDRA.

How! How!
See—see quick!
Keep the bull from the cow!
In the vesture she catching him, strikes him now
With the black-horned trick,
And he falls in the watery vase!
Of the craft-killing cauldron I tell thee the case!

CHOROS.

I would not boast to be a topping critic
Of oracles: but to some sort of evil
I liken these. From oracles, what good speech
To mortals, beside, is sent?
It comes of their evils: these arts word-abounding
that sing the event
Bring the fear 't is their office to teach.

KASSANDRA.

Ah me, ah me—
Of me unhappy, evil-destined fortunes!
For I bewail my proper woe

As, mine with his, all into one I throw.
Why hast thou hither me unhappy brought?
—Unless that I should die with him—for nought!
What else was sought?

CHOROS.

Thou art some mind-mazed creature, god-possessed:
And all about thyself dost wail
A lay—no lay!
Like some brown nightingale
Insatiable of noise, who—well-away!—
From her unhappy breast
Keeps moaning Itus, Itus, and his life
With evils, flourishing on each side, rife.

KASSANDRA.

Ah me, ah me,
The fate o' the nightingale, the clear resounder!
For a body wing-borne have the gods cast round her,
And sweet existence, from misfortunes free:
But for myself remains a sundering
With spear, the two-edged thing!

CHOROS.

Whence hast thou this on-rushing god-involving pain

And spasms in vain?
For, things that terrify,
With changing unintelligible cry
Thou strikest up in tune, yet all the while
After that Orthian style!
Whence hast thou limits to the oracular road,
That evils bode?

KASSANDRA.

Ah me, the nuptials, the nuptials of Paris, the deadly to friends!
Ah me, of Skamandros the draught
Paternal! There once, to these ends,
On thy banks was I brought,
The unhappy! And now, by Kokutos and Acheron's shore
I shall soon be, it seems, these my oracles singing once more!

CHOROS.

Why this word, plain too much,
Hast thou uttered? A babe might learn of such!
I am struck with a bloody bite—here under—
At the fate woe-wreaking
Of thee shrill shrieking:
To me who hear—a wonder!

KASSANDRA.

Ah me, the toils—the toils of the city
The wholly destroyed: ah, pity,
Of the sacrificings my father made
In the ramparts' aid—
Much slaughter of grass-fed flocks—that afforded no cure
That the city should not, as it does now, the burthen endure!
But I, with the soul on fire,
Soon to the earth shall cast me and expire.

CHOROS.

To things, on the former consequent,
Again hast thou given vent:
And 't is some evil-meaning fiend doth move thee,
Heavily falling from above thee,
To melodize thy sorrows—else, in singing,
Calamitous, death-bringing!
And of all this the end
I am without resource to apprehend

KASSANDRA.

Well then, the oracle from veils no longer
Shall be outlooking, like a bride new-married:

But bright it seems, against the sun's uprisings
Breathing, to penetrate thee: so as, wave-like,
To wash against the rays a woe much greater
Than this. I will no longer teach by riddles.
And witness, running with me, that of evils
Done long ago, I nosing track the footstep!
For, this same roof here—never quits a Choros
One-voiced, not well-tuned since no "well" it utters:
And truly having drunk, to get more courage,
Man's blood—the Komos keeps within the household
—Hard to be sent outside—of sister Furies:
They hymn their hymn—within the house close sitting—
The first beginning curse: in turn spit forth at
The Brother's bed, to him who spurned it hostile.
Have I missed aught, or hit I like a bowman?
False prophet am I,—knock at doors, a babbler?
Henceforward witness, swearing now, I know not
By other's word the old sins of this household!

CHOROS.

And how should oath, bond honourably binding,
Become thy cure? No less I wonder at thee
—That thou, beyond sea reared, a strange-tongued city
Shouldst hit in speaking, just as if thou stood'st by!

KASSANDRA.

Prophet Apollon put me in this office.

CHOROS.

What, even though a god, with longing smitten?

KASSANDRA.

At first, indeed, shame was to me to say this.

CHOROS.

For, more relaxed grows everyone who fares well.

KASSANDRA.

But he was athlete to me—huge grace breathing!

CHOROS.

Well, to the work of children, went ye law's way?

KASSANDRA.

Having consented, I played false to Loxias.

CHOROS.

Already when the wits inspired possessed of?

KASSANDRA.

Already townsmen all their woes I foretold.

CHOROS.

How wast thou then unhurt by Loxias' anger?

KASSANDRA.

I no one aught persuaded, when I sinned thus.

CHOROS.

To us, at least, now sooth to say thou seemest.

KASSANDRA.

Halloo, halloo, ah, evils!
Again, straightforward foresight's fearful labour
Whirls me, distracting with prelusive last-lays!
Behold ye those there, in the household seated,—
Young ones,—of dreams approaching to the figures?
Children, as if they died by their beloveds—
Hands they have filled with flesh, the meal domestic—
Entrails and vitals both, most piteous burthen,
Plain they are holding!—which their father tasted!
For this, I say, plans punishment a certain
Lion ignoble, on the bed that wallows,

House-guard (ah, me!) to the returning master
—Mine, since to bear the slavish yoke behoves me!
The ship's commander, Ilion's desolator,
Knows not what things the tongue of the lewd she-dog
Speaking, outspreading, shiny-souled, in fashion
Of Até hid, will reach to, by ill fortune!
Such things she dares—the female, the male's slayer!
She is . . . how calling her the hateful bite-beast
May I hit the mark? Some amphisbaina,—Skulla
Housing in rocks, of mariners the mischief,
Revelling Haides' mother,—curse, no truce with,
Breathing at friends! How piously she shouted,
The all-courageous, as at turn of battle!
She seems to joy at the back-bringing safety!
Of this, too, if I nought persuade, all 's one! Why?
What is to be will come. And soon thou, present,
"True prophet all too much" wilt pitying style me.

CHOROS.

Thuestes' feast, indeed, on flesh of children,
I went with, and I shuddered. Fear too holds me
Listing what's true as life, nowise out-imaged.

KASSANDRA.

I say, thou Agamemnon's fate shalt look on.

CHOROS.

Speak good words, O unhappy! Set mouth sleeping!

KASSANDRA.

But Paian stands in no stead to the speech here.

CHOROS.

Nay, if the thing be near: but never be it!

KASSANDRA.

Thou, indeed, prayest: they to kill are busy.

CHOROS.

Of what man is it ministered, this sorrow?

KASSANDRA.

There again, wide thou look'st of my foretellings.

CHOROS.

For, the fulfiller's scheme I have not gone with.

KASSANDRA.

And yet too well I know the speech Hellenic.

CHOROS.

For Puthian oracles, thy speech, and hard too.

KASSANDRA

Papai: what fire this! and it comes upon me!
Ototoi, Lukeion Apollon, ah me—me!
She, the two-footed lioness that sleeps with
The wolf, in absence of the generous lion,
Kills me the unhappy one: and as a poison
Brewing, to put my price too in the anger,
She vows, against her mate this weapon whetting
To pay him back the bringing me, with slaughter.
Why keep I then these things to make me laughed at,
Both wands and, round my neck, oracular fillets?
Thee, at least, ere my own fate will I ruin:
Go, to perdition falling! Boons exchange we—
Some other Até in my stead make wealthy!
See there—himself, Apollon stripping from me
The oracular garment! having looked upon me
—Even in these adornments, laughed by friends at,
As good as foes, i' the balance weighed: and vainly—
For, called crazed stroller,—as I had been gipsy,
Beggar, unhappy, starved to death,—I bore it.
And now the Prophet—prophet me undoing,
Has led away to these so deadly fortunes!

Instead of my sire's altar, waits the hack-block
She struck with first warm bloody sacrificing!
Yet nowise unavenged of gods will death be:
For there shall come another, our avenger,
The mother-slaying scion, father's doomsman:
Fugitive, wanderer, from this land an exile,
Back shall he come,—for friends, copestone these curses!
For there is sworn a great oath from the gods that
Him shall bring hither his fallen sire's prostration.
Why make I then, like an indweller, moaning?
Since at the first I foresaw Ilion's city
Suffering as it has suffered: and who took it,
Thus by the judgment of the gods are faring.
I go, will suffer, will submit to dying!
But, Haides' gates—these same I call, I speak to,
And pray that on an opportune blow chancing,
Without a struggle,—blood the calm death bringing
In easy outflow,—I this eye may close up!

CHOROS.

O much unhappy, but, again, much learned
Woman, long hast thou outstretched! But if truly
Thou knowest thine own fate, how comes that, like to
A god-led steer, to altar bold thou treadest?

KASSANDRA.

There 's no avodiance,—strangers, no some time more!

CHOROS.

He last is, anyhow, by time advantaged.

KASSANDRA.

It comes, the day : I shall by flight gain little.

CHOROS.

But know thou patient art from thy brave spirit!

KASSANDRA.

Such things hears no one of the happy-fortuned.

CHOROS.

But gloriously to die—for man is grace, sure.

KASSANDRA.

Ah, sire, for thee and for thy noble children!

CHOROS.

But what thing is it? What fear turns thee backwards?

KASSANDRA.

Alas, alas!

CHOROS.

Why this "Alas!" if 't is no spirit's loathing?

KASSANDRA.

Slaughter blood-dripping does the household smell of!

CHOROS.

How else? This scent is of hearth-sacrifices.

KASSANDRA.

Such kind of steam as from a tomb is proper!

CHOROS.

No Surian honour to the House thou speak'st of!

KASSANDRA.

But I will go,—even in the household wailing
My fate and Agamemnon's. Life suffice me!
Ah, strangers!
I cry not "ah"—as bird at bush—through terror
Idly! to me, the dead this much bear witness:

When, for me—woman, there shall die a woman,
And, for a man ill-wived, a man shall perish!
This hospitality I ask as dying.

CHOROS.

O sufferer, thee—thy foretold fate I pity.

KASSANDRA.

Yet once for all, to speak a speech, I fain am:
No dirge, mine for myself! The sun I pray to,
Fronting his last light!—to my own avengers—
That from my hateful slayers they exact too
Pay for the dead slave—easy-managed hand's work!

CHOROS.

Alas for mortal matters! Happy-fortuned,—
Why, any shade would turn them: if unhappy,
By throws the wetting sponge has spoiled the picture!
And more by much in mortals this I pity.
The being well-to-do—
Insatiate a desire of this
Born with all mortals is,
Nor any is there who
Well-being forces off, aroints
From roofs whereat a finger points,

"No more come in!" exclaiming. This man, too,
To take the city of Priamos did the celestials give,
And, honoured by the god, he homeward comes;
But now if, of the former, he shall pay
The blood back, and, for those who ceased to live,
Dying, for deaths in turn new punishment he dooms—
Who, being mortal, would not pray
With an unmischievous
Daimon to have been born—who would not, hearing thus?

AGAMEMNON.

Ah me! I am struck—a right-aimed stroke within me!

CHOROS.

Silence! Who is it shouts "stroke"—"right-aimedly" a wounded one?

AGAMEMNON.

Ah me! indeed again,—a second, struck by!

CHOROS.

This work seems to me completed by this "Ah me" of the king's;
But we somehow may together share in solid counsellings.

CHOROS 1.

I, in the first place, my opinion tell you:
—To cite the townsmen, by help-cry, to house here.

CHOROS 2.

To me, it seems we ought to fall upon them
At quickest—prove the fact by sword fresh-flowing!

CHOROS 3.

And I, of such opinion the partaker,
Vote—to do something: not to wait—the main point!

CHOROS 4.

'T is plain to see: for they prelude as though of
A tyranny the signs they gave the city.

CHOROS 5.

For we waste time; while they,—this waiting's glory
Treading to ground,—allow the hand no slumber.

CHOROS 6.

I know not—chancing on some plan—to tell it:
'T is for the doer to plan of the deed also.

CHOROS 7.

And I am such another: since I 'm schemeless
How to raise up again by words—a dead man!

CHOROS 8.

What, and, protracting life, shall we give way thus
To the disgracers of our home, these rulers?

CHOROS 9.

Why, 't is unbearable: but to die is better:
For death than tyranny is the riper finish!

CHOROS 10.

What, by the testifying "Ah me" of him,
Shall we prognosticate the man as perished?

CHOROS 11.

We must quite know ere speak these things concerning:
For to conjecture and "quite know" are two things.

CHOROS 12.

This same to praise I from all sides abound in—
Clearly to know—Atreides, what he 's doing!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Much having been before to purpose spoken,
The opposite to say I shall not shamed be:
For how should one, to enemies,—in semblance,
Friends,—enmity proposing,—sorrow's net-frame
Enclose, a height superior to outleaping?
To me, indeed, this struggle of old—not mindless
Of an old victory—came: with time, I grant you!
I stand where I have struck, things once accomplished:
And so have done,—and this deny I shall not,—
As that his fate was nor to fly nor ward off.
A wrap-round with no outlet, as for fishes,
I fence about him—the rich woe of the garment:
I strike him twice, and in a double "Ah-me!"
He let his limbs go—*there!* And to him, fallen,
The third blow add I, giving—of Below-ground
Zeus, guardian of the dead—the votive favour.
Thus in the mind of him he rages, falling,
And blowing forth a brisk blood-spatter, strikes me
With the dark drop of slaughterous dew—rejoicing
No less than, at the god-given dewy-comfort,
The sown-stuff in its birth-throes from the calyx.
Since so these things are,—Argives, my revered here,—
Ye may rejoice—if ye rejoice: but I—boast!
If it were fit on corpse to pour libation.

That would be right—right over and above, too!
The cup of evils in the house he, having
Filled with such curses, himself coming drinks of.

CHOROS.

We wonder at thy tongue: since bold-mouthed truly
Is she who in such speech boasts o'er her husband!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Ye test me as I were a witless woman:
But I—with heart intrepid—to you knowers
Say (and thou—if thou wilt or praise or blame me,
Comes to the same)—this man is Agamemnon,
My husband, dead, the work of the right hand here,
Ay, of a just artificer: so things are.

CHOROS.

What evil, O woman, food or drink, earth-bred
Or sent from the flowing sea,
Of such having fed
Didst thou set on thee
This sacrifice
And popular cries
Of a curse on thy head?
Off thou hast thrown him, off hast cut

The man from the city: but—
Off from the city thyself shalt be
Cut—to the citizens
A hate immense!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Now, indeed, thou adjudgest exile to me,
And citizens' hate, and to have popular curses:
Nothing of this against the man here bringing,
Who, no more awe-checked than as 't were a beast's fate,—
With sheep abundant in the well-fleeced graze-flocks,—
Sacrificed *his* child,—dearest fruit of travail
To me,—as song-spell against Threkian blowings.
Not *him* did it behove thee hence to banish
—Pollution's penalty? But hearing *my* deeds
Justicer rough thou art! Now, this I tell thee:
To threaten thus—me, one prepared to have thee
(On like conditions, thy hand conquering) o'er me
Rule: but if God the opposite ordain us,
Thou shalt learn—late taught, certes—to be modest

CHOROS.

Greatly-intending thou art:
Much-mindful, too, hast thou cried

(Since thy mind, with its slaughter-outpouring part,
Is frantic) that over the eyes, a patch
Of blood—with blood to match—
Is plain for a pride!
Yet still, bereft of friends, thy fate
Is—blow with blow to expiate!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

And this thou hearest—of my oaths, just warrant!
By who fulfilled things for my daughter, Justice,
Ate, Erinus,—by whose help I slew him,—
Not mine the fancy—Fear will tread my palace
So long as on my hearth there burns a fire,
Aigisthos as before well-caring for me;
Since he to me is shield, no small, of boldness.
Here does he lie—outrager of this female,
Dainty of all the Chruseids under Ilion;
And she—the captive, the soothsayer also
And couchmate of this man, oracle-speaker,
Faithful bed-fellow,—ay, the sailors' benches
They wore in common, nor unpunished did so,
Since he is—thus! While, as for her,—swan-fashion,
Her latest having chanted,—dying wailing
She lies,—to him, a sweetheart: me she brought to—
My bed's by-nicety—the whet of dalliance.

CHOROS.

Alas, that some
Fate would come
Upon us in quickness—
Neither much sickness
Neither bed-keeping—
And bear unended sleeping,
Now that subdued
Is our keeper, the kindest of mood!
Having borne, for a woman's sake, much strife—
By a woman he withered from life!
Ah me!
Law-breaking Helena who, one,
Hast many, so many souls undone
'Neath Troia! and now the consummated
Much-memorable curse
Hast thou made flower-forth, red
With the blood no rains disperse,
That which was then in the House—
Strife all-subduing, the woe of a spouse.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Nowise, of death the fate—
Burdened by these things—supplicate!
Nor on Helena turn thy wrath

As the man-destroyer, as "she who hath,
Being but one,
Many and many a soul undone
Of the men, the Danaoi"—
And wrought immense annoy!

CHOROS.

Daimon, who fallest
Upon this household and the double-raced
Tantalidai, a rule, minded like theirs displaced,
Thou rulest me with, now,
Whose heart thou gallest!
And on the body, like a hateful crow,
Stationed, all out of tune, his chant to chant
Doth Something vaunt!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Now, of a truth, hast thou set upright
Thy mouth's opinion,—
Naming the Sprite,
The triply gross,
O'er the race that has dominion:
For through him it is that Eros
The carnage-licker
In the belly is bred: ere ended quite
Is the elder throe—new ichor!

CHOROS.

Certainly, great of might
And heavy of wrath, the Sprite
Thou tellest of, in the palace
(Woe, woe!)
—An evil tale of a fate
By Até's malice
Rendered insatiate!
Oh, oh,—
King, king, how shall I beweep thee?
From friendly soul whatever say?
Thou liest where webs of the spider o'ersweep
thee
In impious death, life breathing away.
O me—me!
This couch, not free.
By a slavish death subdued thou art,
From the hand, by the two-edged dart.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Thou boastest this deed to be mine:
But leave off styling me
"The Agamemnonian wife!"
For, showing himself in sign
Of the spouse of the corpse thou dost see,

Did the ancient bitter avenging-ghost
Of Atreus, savage host,
Pay the man here as price—
A full-grown for the young one's sacrifice.

CHOROS.

That no cause, indeed, of this killing art thou,
Who shall be witness-bearer?
How shall he bear it—how?
But the sire's avenging-ghost might be in the deed a sharer.
He is forced on and on
By the kin-born flowing of blood,
—Black Ares: to where, having gone,
He shall leave off, flowing done,
At the frozen-child's-flesh food.
King, king, how shall I beweep thee?
From friendly soul whatever say?
Thou liest where webs of the spider o'ersweep thee
In impious death, life breathing away.
O me—me!
This couch, not free!
By a slavish death subdued thou art,
From the hand, by the two-edged dart.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

No death "unfit for the free"
Do I think this man's to be:
For did not himself a slavish curse
To his household decree?
But the scion of him, myself did nurse—
That much-bewailed Iphigeneia, he
Having done well by,—and as well, nor worse,
Been done to,—let him not in Haides loudly
Bear himself proudly!
Being by sword-destroying death amerced
For that sword's punishment himself inflicted first.

CHOROS.

I at a loss am left—
Of a feasible scheme of mind bereft—
Where I may turn: for the house is falling:
I fear the bloody crash of the rain
That ruins the roof as it bursts amain:
The warning-drop
Has come to a stop.
Destiny doth Justice whet
For other deed of hurt, on other whetstones yet.
Woe, earth, earth—would thou hadst taken *me*
Ere I saw the man I see,

On the pallet-bed
Of the silver-sided bath-vase, dead!
Who is it shall bury him, who
Sing his dirge? Can it be true
That *thou* wilt dare this same to do—
Having slain thy husband, thine own,
To make his funeral moan:
And for the soul of him, in place
Of his mighty deeds, a graceless grace
To wickedly institute? By whom
Shall the tale of praise o'er the tomb
At the god-like man be sent—
From the truth of his mind as he toils intent?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

It belongs not to thee to declare
This object of care!
By us did he fall—down there!
Did he die—down there! and down, no less,
We will bury him there, and not beneath
The wails of the household over his death:
But Iphigeneia,—with kindliness,—
His daughter,—as the case requires,
Facing him full, at the rapid-flowing
Passage of Groans shall—both hands throwing
Around him—kiss that kindest of sires!

CHOROS.

This blame comes in the place of blame:
Hard battle it is to judge each claim.
"He is borne away who bears away:
And the killer has all to pay."
And this remains while Zeus is remaining,
"The doer shall suffer in time"—for, such his ordaining.
Who may cast out of the House its cursed brood?
The race is to Até glued!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Thou hast gone into this oracle
With a true result. For me, then,—I will
—To the Daimon of the Pleisthenidai
Making an oath—with all these things comply
Hard as they are to bear. For the rest—
Going from out this House, a guest,
May he wear some other family
To nought, with the deaths of kin by kin!
And,—keeping a little part of my goods,—
Wholly am I contented in
Having expelled from the royal House
These frenzied moods
The mutually-murderous.

AIGISTHOS.

O light propitious of day justice-bringing!
I may say truly, now, that men's avengers,
The gods from high, of earth behold the sorrows—
Seeing, as I have, i' the spun robes of the Erinues,
This man here lying,—sight to me how pleasant!—
His father's hands' contrivances repaying.
For Atreus, this land's lord, of this man father,
Thuestes, my own father—to speak clearly—
His brother too,—being i' the rule contested,—
Drove forth to exile from both town and household:
And, coming back, to the hearth turned, a suppliant,
Wretched Thuestes found the fate assured him
—Not to die, bloodying his paternal threshold
Just there: but host-wise this man's impious father
Atreus, soul-keenly more than kindly,—seeming
To joyous hold a flesh-day,—to my father
Served up a meal, the flesh of his own children.
The feet indeed and the hands' top divisions
He hid, high up and isolated sitting:
But, their unshowing parts in ignorance taking,
He forthwith eats food—as thou seest—perdition
To the race: and then, 'ware of the deed ill-omened,
He shrieked O!—falls back, vomiting, from the carnage,
And fate on the Pelopidai past bearing

He prays down—putting in his curse together
The kicking down o' the feast—that so might perish
The race of Pleisthenes entire: and thence is
That it is given thee to see this man prostrate.
And I was rightly of this slaughter stitch-man:
Since me,—being third from ten,—with my poor father
He drives out—being then a babe in swathe-bands:
But, grown up, back again has justice brought me:
And of this man I got hold—being without-doors—
Fitting together the whole scheme of ill-will.
So, sweet, in fine, even to die were to me,
Seeing, as I have, this man i' the toils of justice!

CHOROS.

Aigisthos, arrogance in ills I love not.
Dost thou say—willing, thou didst kill the man here,
And, alone, plot this lamentable slaughter?
I say—thy head in justice will escape not
The people's throwing—know that!—stones and curses!

AIGISTHOS.

Thou such things soundest—seated at the lower
Oarage to those who rule at the ship's mid-bench?
Thou shalt know, being old, how heavy is teaching
To one of the like age—bidden be modest!

But chains and old age and the pangs of fasting
Stand out before all else in teaching,—prophets
At souls'-cure! Dost not, seeing aught, see this too?
Against goads kick not, lest tript-up thou suffer!

CHOROS.

Woman, thou,—of him coming new from battle
Houseguard—thy husband's bed the while dis-
gracing,—
For the Army-leader didst thou plan this fate too?

AIGISTHOS.

These words too are of groans the prime-begetters!
Truly a tongue opposed to Orpheus hast thou:
For he led all things by his voice's grace-charm,
But thou, upstirring them by these wild yelpings,
Wilt lead them! Forced, thou wilt appear the tamer!

CHOROS.

So—thou shalt be my king then of the Argeians—
Who, not when for this man his fate thou plannedst,
Daredst to do this deed—thyself the slayer!

AIGISTHOS.

For, to deceive him was the wife's part, certes:

I was looked after—foe, ay, old-begotten!
But out of this man's wealth will I endeavour
To rule the citizens: and the no-man-minder
—Him will I heavily yoke—by no means trace-horse,
A corned-up colt! but that bad friend in darkness,
Famine its housemate, shall behold him gentle.

CHOROS.

Why then, this man here, from a coward spirit,
Didst not thou slay thyself? But,—helped,—a woman,
The country's pest, and that of gods o' the country,
Killed him! Orestes, where may he see light now?
That coming hither back, with gracious fortune,
Of both these he may be the all-conquering slayer?

AIGISTHOS.

But since this to do thou thinkest—and not talk—thou soon shalt know!
Up then, comrades dear! the proper thing to do—not distant this!

CHOROS

Up then! hilt in hold, his sword let everyone aright dispose!

AIGISTHOS.

Ay, but I myself too, hilt in hold, do not refuse to die.

CHOROS.

Thou wilt die, thou say'st, to who accept it. We the chance demand.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Nowise, O belovedest of men, may we do other ills!
To have reaped away these, even, is a harvest much to me.
Go, both thou and these the old men, to the homes appointed each,
Ere ye suffer! It behoved one do these things just as we did:
And if of these troubles there should be enough--we may assent
—By the Daimon's heavy heel unfortunately stricken ones!
So a woman's counsel hath it—if one judge it learning worth.

AIGISTHOS.

But to think that these at me the idle tongue should thus o'erbloom,

And throw out such words—the Daimon's power experimenting on—
And, of modest knowledge missing,—me, the ruler, . . .

CHOROS.

Ne'er may this befall Argeians—wicked man to fawn before!

AIGISTHOS.

Anyhow, in after days, will I, yes, I, be at thee yet!

CHOROS.

Not if hither should the Daimon make Orestes straightway come!

AIGISTHOS.

O, I know, myself, that fugitives on hopes are pasture-fed!

CHOROS.

Do thy deed, get fat, defiling justice, since the power is thine!

AIGISTHOS.

Know that thou shalt give me satisfaction for this folly's sake!

CHOROS.

Boast on, bearing thee audacious, like a cock his females by!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Have not thou respect for these same idle yelpings! I and thou
Will arrange it, o'er this household ruling excellently well.

END OF THE THIRTEENTH VOLUME.

THE POETICAL WORKS

of

ROBERT BROWNING

VOL. XIV.

PACCHIAROTTO
AND
HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER

WITH OTHER POEMS

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PACCHIAROTTO

AND

HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER

ET CETERA

PROLOGUE.

I.

O the old wall here! How I could pass
  Life in a long Midsummer day,
My feet confined to a plot of grass,
  My eyes from a wall not once away!

II.

And lush and lithe do the creepers clothe
  Yon wall I watch, with a wealth of green:
Its bald red bricks draped, nothing loth,
  In lappets of tangle they laugh between.

III.

Now, what is it makes pulsate the robe?
  Why tremble the sprays? What life o'erbrims
The body,—the house, no eye can probe,—
  Divined as, beneath a robe, the limbs?

IV.

And there again! But my heart may guess
Who tripped behind; and she sang perhaps:
So, the old wall throbbed, and its life's excess
Died out and away in the leafy wraps.

V.

Wall upon wall are between us: life
And song should away from heart to heart.
I—prison-bird, with a ruddy strife
At breast, and a lip whence storm-notes start—

VI.

Hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing
That 's spirit: though cloistered fast, soar free;
Account as wood, brick, stone, this ring
Of the rueful neighbours, and—forth to thee!

OF PACCHIAROTTO, AND HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER.

1876

I.

QUERY: was ever a quainter
Crotchet than this of the painter
Giacomo Pacchiarotto
Who took "Reform" for his motto?

II.

He, pupil of old Fungaio,
Is always confounded (heigho!)
With Pacchia, contemporaneous
No question, but how extraneous
In the grace of soul, the power
Of hand,—undoubted dower
Of Pacchia who decked (as *we* know,
My Kirkup!) San Bernardino,

Turning the small dark Oratory
To Siena's Art-laboratory,
As he made its straitness roomy
And glorified its gloomy,
With Bazzi and Beccafumi.
(Another heigho for Bazzi:
How people miscall him Razzi!)

III.

This Painter was of opinion
Our earth should be his dominion
Whose Art could correct to pattern
What Nature had slurred—the slattern!
And since, beneath the heavens,
Things lay now at sixes and sevens,
Or, as he said, *sopra-sotto*—
Thought the painter Pacchiarotto
Things wanted reforming, therefore.
"Wanted it"—ay, but wherefore?
When earth held one so ready
As he to step forth, stand steady
In the middle of God's creation
And prove to demonstration
What the dark is, what the light is,
What the wrong is, what the right is,

What the ugly, what the beautiful,
What the restive, what the dutiful,
In Mankind profuse around him?
Man, devil as now he found him,
Would presently soar up angel
At the summons of such evangel,
And owe—what would Man *not* owe
To the painter Pacchiarotto?
Ay, look to thy laurels, Giotto!

IV

But Man, he perceived, was stubborn,
Grew regular brute, once cub born;
And it struck him as expedient—
Ere he tried to make obedient
The wolf, fox, bear and monkey,
By piping advice in one key—
That his pipe should play a prelude
To something heaven-tinged not hell-hued,
Something not harsh but docile,
Man-liquid, not Man-fossil—
Not fact, in short, but fancy.
By a laudable necromancy
He would conjure up ghosts—a circle
Deprived of the means to work ill

Should his music prove distasteful
And pearls to the swine go wasteful.
To be rent of swine—that *was* hard!
With fancy he ran no hazard:
Fact might knock him o'er the mazzard.

V

So, the painter Pacchiarotto
Constructed himself a grotto
In the quarter of Stalloreggi—
As authors of note allege ye.
And on each of the whitewashed sides of it
He painted—(none far and wide so fit
As he to perform in fresco)—
He painted nor cried *quiesco*
Till he peopled its every square foot
With Man—from the Beggar barefoot
To the Noble in cap and feather:
All sorts and conditions together.
The Soldier in breastplate and helmet
Stood frowningly—hail fellow well met—
By the Priest armed with bell, book and candle
Nor did he omit to handle
The Fair Sex, our brave distemperer:
Not merely King, Clown, Pope, Emperor—
He diversified too his Hades

Of all forms, pinched Labour and paid Ease,
With as mixed an assemblage of Ladies.

VI.

Which work done, dry,—he rested him,
Cleaned pallet, washed brush, divested him
Of the apron that suits *frescanti*,
And, bonnet on ear stuck jaunty,
This hand upon hip well planted,
That, free to wave as it wanted,
He addressed in a choice oration
His folk of each name and nation,
Taught its duty to every station.
The Pope was declared an arrant
Impostor at once, I warrant.
The Emperor—truth might tax him
With ignorance of the maxim
"Shear sheep but nowise flay them!"
And the Vulgar that obey them,
The Ruled, well-matched with the Ruling,
They failed not of wholesome schooling
On their knavery and their fooling.
As for Art—where's decorum? Pooh-poohed it is
By Poets that plague us with lewd ditties,
And Painters that pester with nudities!

VII.

Now, your rater and debater
Is baulked by a mere spectator
Who simply stares and listens
Tongue tied, while eye nor glistens
Nor brow grows hot and twitchy,
Nor mouth, for a combat itchy,
Quivers with some convincing
Reply—that sets him wincing?
Nay, rather—reply that furnishes
Your debater with just what burnishes
The crest of him, all one triumph,
As you see him rise, hear him cry "Humph!
Convinced am I? This confutes me?
Receive the rejoinder that suits me!
Confutation of vassal for prince meet—
Wherein all the powers that convince meet,
And mash my opponent to mincemeat!"

VIII.

So, off from his head flies the bonnet,
His hip loses hand planted on it,
While t' other hand, frequent in gesture,
Slinks modestly back beneath vesture,
As,—hop, skip and jump,—he 's along with

Those weak ones he late proved so strong with!
Pope, Emperor, lo, he 's beside them,
Friendly now, who late could not abide them,
King, Clown, Soldier, Priest, Noble, Burgess;
And his voice, that out-roared Boanerges,
How minikin-mildly it urges
In accents how gentled and gingered
Its word in defence of the injured!
"O call him not culprit, this Pontiff!
Be hard on this Kaiser ye won't if
Ye take into con-si-der-ation
What dangers attend elevation!
The Priest—who expects him to descant
On duty with more zeal and less cant?
He preaches but rubbish he 's reared in.
The Soldier, grown deaf (by the mere din
Of battle) to mercy, learned tippling
And what not of vice while a stripling.
The Lawyer—his lies are conventional.
And as for the Poor Sort—why mention all
Obstructions that leave barred and bolted
Access to the brains of each dolt-head?"

IX.

He ended, you wager? Not half! A bet?
Precedence to males in the alphabet!

Still, disposed of Man's A, B, C, there's X,
Y, Z, want assistance,—the Fair Sex!
How much may be said in excuse of
Those vanities—males see no use of—
From silk shoe on heel to laced poll's-hood!
What 's their frailty beside our own falsehood?
The boldest, most brazen of . . . trumpets,
How kind can they be to their dumb pets!
Of their charms—how are most frank, how few venal!
While as for those charges of Juvenal—
Quæ nemo dixisset in toto
Nisi (*ædepol*) *ore illoto*—
He dismissed every charge with an "*Apage!*"

X.

Then, cocking (in Scotch phrase) his cap a-gee,
Right hand disengaged from the doublet
—Like landlord, in house he had sub-let
Resuming of guardianship gestion,
To call tenants' conduct in question—
Hop, skip, jump, to inside from outside
Of chamber, he lords, ladies, louts eyed
With such transformation of visage
As fitted the censor of this age.
No longer an advocate tepid
Of frailty, but champion intrepid

Of strength, not of falsehood but verity,
He, one after one, with asperity
Stripped bare all the cant-clothed abuses,
Disposed of sophistic excuses,
Forced folly each shift to abandon,
And left vice with no leg to stand on.
So crushing the force he exerted,
That Man at his foot lay converted!

XI.

True—Man bred of paint-pot and mortar!
But why suppose folks of this sort are
More likely to hear and be tractable
Than folks all alive and, in fact, able
To testify promptly by action
Their ardour, and make satisfaction
For misdeeds *non verbis sed factis?*
"With folk all alive be my practice
Henceforward! O mortar, paint-pot O,
Farewell to ye!" cried Pacchiarotto,
"Let only occasion intérpose!"

XII.

It did so: for, pat to the purpose
Through causes I need not examine,

There fell upon Siena a famine.
In vain did the magistrates busily
Seek succour, fetch grain out of Sicily,
Nay, throw mill and bakehouse wide open—
Such misery followed as no pen
Of mine shall depict ye. Faint, fainter
Waxed hope of relief: so, our painter,
Emboldened by triumph of recency,
How could he do other with decency
Than rush in this strait to the rescue,
Play schoolmaster, point as with fescue
To each and all slips in Man's spelling
The law of the land?—slips now telling
With monstrous effect on the city,
Whose magistrates moved him to pity
As, bound to read law to the letter,
They minded their hornbook no better.

XIII.

I ought to have told you, at starting,
How certain, who itched to be carting
Abuses away clean and thorough
From Siena, both province and borough,
Had formed themselves into a company
Whose swallow could bolt in a lump any

Obstruction of scruple, provoking
The nicer throat's coughing and choking:
Fit Club, by as fit a name dignified
Of "Freed Ones"—"*Bardotti*"—which signified
"Spare-Horses" that walk by the waggon
The team has to drudge for and drag on.
This notable club Pacchiarotto
Had joined long since, paid scot and lot to,
As free and accepted "Bardotto."
The Bailiwick watched with no quiet eye
The outrage thus done to society,
And noted the advent especially
Of Pachiarotto their fresh ally.

XIV.

These Spare-Horses forthwith assembled:
Neighed words whereat citizens trembled
As oft as the chiefs, in the Square by
The Duomo, proposed a way whereby
The city were cured of disaster.
"Just substitute servant for master,
Make Poverty Wealth and Wealth Poverty,
Unloose Man from overt and covert tie,
And straight out of social confusion
True Order would spring!" Brave illusion—
Aims heavenly attained by means earthy!

XV.

Off to these at full speed rushed our worthy,—
Brain practised and tongue no less tutored,
In argument's armour accoutred,—
Sprang forth, mounted rostrum and essayed
Proposals like those to which "Yes" said
So glibly each personage painted
O' the wall-side wherewith you 're acquainted.
He harangued on the faults of the Bailiwick:
"Red soon were our State-candle's paly wick,
If wealth would become but interfluous,
Fill voids up with just the superfluous;
If ignorance gave way to knowledge
—Not pedantry picked up at college
From Doctors, Professors *et cætera*—
(*They* say: '*kai ta loipa*'—like better a
Long Greek string of *kappas*, *taus*, *lambdas*,
Tacked on to the tail of each damned ass)—
No knowledge we want of this quality,
But knowledge indeed—practicality
Through insight's fine universality!
If you shout '*Bailiffs*, *out on ye all!* *Fie*,
Thou Chief of our forces, *Amalfi*,
Who shieldest the rogue and the clotpoll!'
If you pounce on and poke out, with what pole

I leave ye to fancy, our Siena's
Beast-litter of sloths and hyenas—"
(Whoever to scan this is ill able
Forgets the town's name 's a dissyllable)
"If, this done, ye did—as ye might—place
For once the right man in the right place,
If you listened to me . . ."

XVI.

At which last "If"
There flew at his throat like a mastiff
One Spare-Horse—another and another!
Such outbreak of tumult and pother,
Horse-faces a-laughing and fleering,
Horse-voices a-mocking and jeering,
Horse-hands raised to collar the caitiff
Whose impudence ventured the late "If"—
That, had not fear sent Pacchiarotto
Off tramping, as fast as could trot toe,
Away from the scene of discomfiture—
Had he stood there stock-still in a dumb fit—sure
Am I he had paid in his person
Till his mother might fail to know her son,
Though she gazed on him never so wistful,
In the figure so tattered and tristful.

Each mouth full of curses, each fist full
Of cuffings—behold, Pacchiarotto,
The pass which thy project has got to,
Of trusting, nigh ashes still hot—tow!
(The paraphrase—which I much need—is
From Horace "*per ignes incedis.*")

XVII.

Right and left did he dash helter-skelter
In agonized search of a shelter.
No purlieu so blocked and no alley
So blind as allowed him to rally
His spirits and see—nothing hampered
His steps if he trudged and not scampered
Up here and down there in a city
That 's all ups and downs, more the pity
For folk who would outrun the constable.
At last he stopped short at the one stable
And sure place of refuge that 's offered
Humanity. Lately was coffered
A corpse in its sepulchre, situate
By St. John's Observance. "Habituate
Thyself to the strangest of bedfellows,
And, kicked by the live, kiss the dead fellows!"
So Misery counselled the craven.

At once he crept safely to haven
Through a hole left unbricked in the structure.
Ay, Misery, in have you tucked your
Poor client and left him conterminous
With—pah!—the thing fetid and verminous!
(I gladly would spare you the detail,
But History writes what I retail.)

XVIII.

Two days did he groan in his domicile:
"Good Saints, set me free and I promise I 'll
Abjure all ambition of preaching
Change, whether to minds touched by teaching
—The smooth folk of fancy, mere figments
Created by plaster and pigments,—
Or to minds that receive with such rudeness
Dissuasion from pride, greed and lewdness,
—The rough folk of fact, life's true specimens
Of mind—'*haud in posse sed esse mens*'
As it was, is, and shall be for ever
Despite of my utmost endeavour.
O live foes I thought to illumine,
Henceforth lie untroubled your gloom in!
I need my own light, every spark, as
I couch with this sole friend—a carcase!"

XIX.

Two days thus he maundered and rambled;
Then, starved back to sanity, scrambled
From out his receptacle loathsome.
"A spectre!"—declared upon oath some
Who saw him emerge and (appalling
To mention) his garments a-crawling
With plagues far beyond the Egyptian.
He gained, in a state past description
A convent of monks, the Observancy.

XX.

Thus far is a fact: I reserve fancy
For Fancy's more proper employment:
And now she waves wing with enjoyment,
To tell ye how preached the Superior
When somewhat our painter's exterior
Was sweetened. He needed (no mincing
The matter) much soaking and rincing,
Nay, rubbing with drugs odoriferous,
Till, rid of his garments pestiferous
And robed by the help of the Brotherhood
In odds and ends,—this gown and t' other hood,—
His empty inside first well-garnished,—
He delivered a tale round, unvarnished.

XXI.

"Ah, Youth!" ran the Abbot's admonishment,
"Thine error scarce moves my astonishment.
For—why shall I shrink from asserting?—
Myself have had hopes of converting
The foolish to wisdom, till, sober,
My life found its May grow October.
I talked and I wrote, but, one morning,
Life's Autumn bore fruit in this warning:
'*Let tongue rest, and quiet thy quill be!*
Earth is earth and not heaven, and ne'er will be.'
Man's work is to labour and leaven—
As best he may—earth here with heaven;
'T is work for work's sake that he 's needing:
Let him work on and on as if speeding
Work's end, but not dream of succeeding!
Because if success were intended,
Why, heaven would begin ere earth ended.
A Spare-Horse? Be rather a thill-horse,
Or—what 's the plain truth—just a mill-horse!
Earth 's a mill where we grind and wear mufflers:
A whip awaits shirkers and shufflers
Who slacken their pace, sick of lugging
At what don't advance for their tugging.

Though round goes the mill, we must still post
On and on as if moving the mill-post.
So, grind away, mouth-wise and pen-wise,
Do all that we can to make men wise!
And if men prefer to be foolish,
Ourselves have proved horse-like not mulish:
Sent grist, a good sackful, to hopper,
And worked as the Master thought proper.
Tongue I wag, pen I ply, who am Abbot;
Stick thou, Son, to daub-brush and dab-pot!
But, soft! I scratch hard on the scab hot?
Though cured of thy plague, there may linger
A pimple I fray with rough finger?
So soon could my homily transmute
Thy brass into gold? Why, the man 's mute!"

XXII.

"Ay, Father, I 'm mute with admiring
How Nature's indulgence untiring
Still bids us turn deaf ear to Reason's
Best rhetoric—clutch at all seasons
And hold fast to what 's proved untenable!
Thy maxim is—Man 's not amenable
To argument: whereof by consequence—
Thine arguments reach me: a non-sequence!

Yet blush not discouraged, O Father!
I stand unconverted, the rather
That nowise I need a conversion.
No live man (I cap thy assertion)
By argument ever could take hold
Of me. 'T was the dead thing, the clay-cold,
Which grinned '*Art thou so in a hurry*
That out of warm light thou must skurry
And join me down here in the dungeon
Because, above, one's Jack and one—John,
One's swift in the race, one—a hobbler,
One's a crowned king, and one—a capped cobbler,
Rich and poor, sage and fool, virtuous, vicious?
Why complain? Art thou so unsuspicious
That all's for an hour of essaying
Who's fit and who's unfit for playing
His part in the after-construction
—Heaven's Piece whereof Earth's the Induction?
Things rarely go smooth at Rehearsal.
Wait patient the change universal,
And act, and let act, in existence!
For, as thou art clapped hence or hissed hence,
Thou hast thy promotion or otherwise.
And why must wise thou have thy brother wise
Because in rehearsal thy cue be
To shine by the side of a booby?

No polishing garnet to ruby!
All 's well that ends well—through Art's magic
Some end, whether comic or tragic,
The Artist has purposed, be certain!
Explained at the fall of the curtain—
In showing thy wisdom at odds with
That folly: he tries men and gods with
No problem for weak wits to solve meant,
But one worth such Author's evolvement.
So, back nor disturb play's production
By giving thy brother instruction
To throw up his fool's-part allotted!
Lest haply thyself prove besotted
When stript, for thy pains, of that costume
Of sage, which has bred the imposthume
I prick to relieve thee of,—Vanity!'

XXIII.

"So, Father, behold me in sanity!
I 'm back to the palette and mahlstick:
And as for Man—let each and all stick
To what was prescribed them at starting
Once planted as fools—no departing
From folly one inch, *sæculorum*
In sæcula! Pass me the jorum,

And push me the platter—my stomach
Retains, through its fasting, still some ache—
And then, with your kind *Benedicite*,
Good-bye!"

XXIV.

I have told with simplicity
My tale, dropped those harsh analytics,
And tried to content you, my critics,
Who greeted my early uprising!
I knew you through all the disguising,
Droll dogs, as I jumped up, cried "Heyday!
This Monday is—what else but May-day?
And these in the drabs, blues and yellows,
Are surely the privileged fellows.
So, saltbox and bones, tongs and bellows,"
(I threw up the window) "your pleasure?"

XXV.

Then he who directed the measure—
An old friend—put leg forward nimbly,
"We critics as sweeps out your chimbly!
Much soot to remove from your flue, sir!
Who spares coal in kitchen an't you, sir!

And neighbours complain it 's no joke, sir,
—You ought to consume your own smoke, sir!"

XXVI.

Ah, rogues, but my housemaid suspects you—
Is confident oft she detects you
In bringing more filth into my house
Than ever you found there! I 'm pious
However: 't was God made you dingy
And me—with no need to be stingy
Of soap, when 't is sixpence the packet.
So, dance away, boys, dust my jacket,
Bang drum and blow fife—ay, and rattle
Your brushes, for that 's half the battle!
Don't trample the grass,—hocus-pocus
With grime my Spring snowdrop and crocus,—
And, what with your rattling and tinkling,
Who knows but you give me an inkling
How music sounds, thanks to the jangle
Of regular drum and triangle?
Whereby, tap-tap, chink-chink, 't is proven
I break rule as bad as Beethoven.
"That chord now—a groan or a grunt is 't?
Schumann's self was no worse contrapuntist.
No ear! or if ear, so tough-gristled—
He thought that he sung while he whistled!"

XXVII.

So, this time I whistle, not sing at all,
My story, the largess I fling at all
And every the rough there whose *aubade*
Did its best to amuse me,—nor *so* bad!
Take my thanks, pick up largess, and scamper
Off free, ere your mirth gets a damper!
You 've Monday, your one day, your fun-day,
While mine is a year that 's all Sunday.
I 've seen you, times—who knows how many?—
Dance in here, strike up, play the zany,
Make mouths at the tenant, hoot warning
You 'll find him decamped next May-morning;
Then scuttle away, glad to 'scape hence
With—kicks? no, but laughter and ha'pence!
Mine 's freehold, by grace of the grand Lord
Who lets out the ground here,—my landlord:
To him I pay quit-rent—devotion;
Nor hence shall I budge, I 've a notion,
Nay, here shall my whistling and singing
Set all his street's echoes a-ringing
Long after the last of your number
Has ceased my front-court to encumber
While, treading down rose and ranunculus,
You *Tommy-make-room-for-your-Uncle* us!

Troop, all of you—man or homunculus,
Quick march! for Xanthippe, my housemaid,
If once on your pates she a souse made
With what, pan or pot, bowl or *skoramis*
First comes to her hand—things were more amiss!
I would not for worlds be your place in—
Recipient of slops from the basin!
You, Jack-in-the-Green, leaf-and-twiggishness
Won't save a dry thread on your priggishness!
While as for Quilp-Hop-o'-my-thumb there,
Banjo-Byron that twangs the strum-strum there—
He 'll think, as the pickle he curses,
I 've discharged on his pate his own verses!
"Dwarfs are saucy," says Dickens: so, sauced in
Your own sauce, . . .[1]

XXVIII.

But, back to my Knight of the Pencil,
Dismissed to his fresco and stencil!
Whose story—begun with a chuckle,
And throughout timed by raps of the knuckle,—
To small enough purpose were studied
If it ends with crown cracked or nose bloodied.

[1] No, please! For

"Who would be satirical
On a thing so very small?"—PRINTER'S DEVIL.

Come, critics,—not shake hands, excuse me!
But—say have you grudged to amuse me
This once in the forty-and-over
Long years since you trampled my clover
And scared from my house-eaves each sparrow
I never once harmed by that arrow
Of song, *karterotaton belos*,
(Which Pindar declares the true *melos*)
I was forging and filing and finishing,
And no whit my labours diminishing
Because, though high up in a chamber
Where none of your kidney may clamber
Your hullabaloo would approach me?
Was it "grammar" wherein you would "coach" me—
You,—pacing in even that paddock
Of language allotted you *ad hoc*,
With a clog at your fetlocks,—you—scorners
Of me free of all its four corners?
Was it "clearness of words which convey thought?"
Ay, if words never needed enswathe aught
But ignorance, impudence, envy
And malice—what word-swathe would then vie
With yours for a clearness crystalline?
But had you to put in one small line
Some thought big and bouncing—as noddle
Of goose, born to cackle and waddle

And bite at man's heel as goose-wont is,
Never felt plague its puny *os frontis*—
You 'd know, as you hissed, spat and sputtered,
Clear cackle is easily uttered!

XXIX.

Lo, I 've laughed out my laugh on this mirth-day!
Beside, at week's end, dawns my birth-day,
That *hebdome, hieron emar*—
(More things in a day than you deem are!)
—*Tei gar Apollona chrusaora*
Egeinato Leto. So, gray or ray
Betide me, six days hence, I 'm vexed here
By no sweep, that 's certain, till next year!
"Vexed?"—roused from what else were insipid ease!
Leave snoring a-bed to Pheidippides!
We 'll up and work! won't we, Euripides?

AT THE "MERMAID"

1876.

> The figure that thou here seest . . . Tut!
> Was it for gentle Shakespeare put?
>
> B. JONSON. (*Adapted.*)

I.

I—"Next Poet?" No, my hearties,
I nor am nor fain would be!
Choose your chiefs and pick your parties,
Not one soul revolt to me!
I, forsooth, sow song-sedition?
I, a schism in verse provoke?
I, blown up by bard's ambition,
Burst—your bubble-king? You joke.

II.

Come, be grave! The sherris mantling
Still about each mouth, mayhap,
Breeds you insight—just a scantling—
Brings me truth out—just a scrap.

Look and tell me! Written, spoken,
Here 's my life-long work: and where
—Where 's your warrant or my token
I 'm the dead king's son and heir?

III.

Here 's my work: does work discover—
What was rest from work—my life?
Did I live man's hater, lover?
Leave the world at peace, at strife?
Call earth ugliness or beauty?
See things there in large or small?
Use to pay its Lord my duty?
Use to own a lord at all?

IV.

Blank of such a record, truly
Here 's the work I hand, this scroll,
Yours to take or leave; as duly,
Mine remains the unproffered soul.
So much, no whit more, my debtors—
How should one like me lay claim
To that largess elders, betters
Sell you cheap their souls for—fame?

V.

Which of you did I enable
Once to slip inside my breast,
There to catalogue and label
What I like least, what love best,
Hope and fear, believe and doubt of,
Seek and shun, respect—deride?
Who has right to make a rout of
Rarities he found inside?

VI.

Rarities or, as he 'd rather,
Rubbish such as stocks his own :
Need and greed (O strange) the Father
Fashioned not for him alone !
Whence—the comfort set a-strutting,
Whence—the outcry " Haste, behold !
Bard's breast open wide, past shutting,
Shows what brass we took for gold ! "

VII.

Friends, I doubt not he 'd display you
Brass—myself call orichalc,—
Furnish much amusement ; pray you
Therefore, be content I baulk

Him and you, and bar my portal!
Here 's my work outside: opine
What 's inside me mean and mortal!
Take your pleasure, leave me mine!

VIII.

Which is—not to buy your laurel
As last king did, nothing loth.
Tale adorned and pointed moral
Gained him praise and pity both.
Out rushed sighs and groans by dozens,
Forth by scores oaths, curses flew:
Proving you were cater-cousins,
Kith and kindred, king and you!

IX.

Whereas do I ne'er so little
(Thanks to sherris) leave ajar
Bosom's gate—no jot nor tittle
Grow we nearer than we are.
Sinning, sorrowing, despairing,
Body-ruined, spirit-wrecked,—
Should I give my woes an airing,—
Where 's one plague that claims respect?

X.

Have you found your life distasteful?
My life did, and does, smack sweet
Was your youth of pleasure wasteful?
Mine I saved and hold complete.
Do your joys with age diminish?
When mine fail me, I 'll complain.
Must in death your daylight finish?
My sun sets to rise again.

XI.

What, like you, he proved—your Pilgrim—
This our world a wilderness,
Earth still grey and heaven still grim,
Not a hand there his might press,
Not a heart his own might throb to,
Men all rogues and women—say,
Dolls which boys' heads duck and bob to,
Grown folk drop or throw away?

XII.

My experience being other,
How should I contribute verse
Worthy of your king and brother?
Balaam-like I bless, not curse.

I find earth not grey but rosy,
Heaven not grim but fair of hue.
Do I stoop? I pluck a posy.
Do I stand and stare? All 's blue.

XIII.

Doubtless I am pushed and shoved by
Rogues and fools enough: the more
Good luck mine, I love, am loved by
Some few honest to the core.
Scan the near high, scout the far low!
"But the low come close:" what then?
Simpletons? My match is Marlowe;
Sciolists? My mate is Ben.

XIV.

Womankind—"the cat-like nature,
False and fickle, vain and weak"—
What of this sad nomenclature
Suits my tongue, if I must speak?
Does the sex invite, repulse so,
Tempt, betray, by fits and starts?
So becalm but to convulse so,
Decking heads and breaking hearts?

XV.

Well may you blaspheme at fortune!
I "threw Venus" (Ben, expound!)
Never did I need importune
Her, of all the Olympian round.
Blessings on my benefactress!
Cursings suit—for aught I know—
Those who twitched her by the back tress,
Tugged and thought to turn her—so!

XVI.

Therefore, since no leg to stand on
Thus I 'm left with,—joy or grief
Be the issue,—I abandon
Hope or care you name me Chief!
Chief and king and Lord 's anointed,
I?—who never once have wished
Death before the day appointed:
Lived and liked, not poohed and pished!

XVII.

"Ah, but so I shall not enter,
Scroll in hand, the common heart—
Stopped at surface: since at centre
Song should reach *Welt-schmerz*, world-smart!"

"Enter in the heart?" Its shelly
Cuirass guard mine, fore and aft!
Such song "enters in the belly
And is cast out in the draught."

XVIII.

Back then to our sherris-brewage!
"Kingship" quotha? I shall wait—
Waive the present time: some new age . . .
But let fools anticipate!
Meanwhile greet me—"friend, good fellow,
Gentle Will," my merry men!
As for making Envy yellow
With "Next Poet"—(Manners, Ben!)

HOUSE.

1876.

I.

SHALL I sonnet-sing you about myself?
Do I live in a house you would like to see?
Is it scant of gear, has it store of pelf?
"Unlock my heart with a sonnet-key?

II.

Invite the world, as my betters have done?
"Take notice: this building remains on view,
Its suites of reception every one,
Its private apartment and bedroom too;

III.

"For a ticket, apply to the Publisher."
No: thanking the public, I must decline.
A peep through my window, if folk prefer;
But, please you, no foot over threshold of mine!

IV.

I have mixed with a crowd and heard free talk
In a foreign land where an earthquake chanced :
And a house stood gaping, nought to baulk
Man's eye wherever he gazed or glanced.

V.

The whole of the frontage shaven sheer,
The inside gaped : exposed to day,
Right and wrong and common and queer,
Bare, as the palm of your hand, it lay.

VI.

The owner? Oh, he had been crushed, no doubt !
" Odd tables and chairs for a man of wealth !
What a parcel of musty old books about !
He smoked,—no wonder he lost his health !

VII.

" I doubt if he bathed before he dressed.
A brasier ?—the pagan, he burned perfumes !
You see it is proved, what the neighbours guessed :
His wife and himself had separate rooms."

VIII.

Friends, the goodman of the house at least
Kept house to himself till an earthquake came:
'T is the fall of its frontage permits you feast
On the inside arrangement you praise or blame.

IX.

Outside should suffice for evidence:
And whoso desires to penetrate
Deeper, must dive by the spirit-sense–
No optics like yours, at any rate!

X.

"Hoity toity! A street to explore,
Your house the exception! '*With this same key*
Shakespeare unlocked his heart,' once more!"
Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he!

SHOP.

1876.

I.

So, friend, your shop was all your house!
Its front, astonishing the street,
Invited view from man and mouse
To what diversity of treat
Behind its glass—the single sheet!

II.

What gimcracks, genuine Japanese:
Gape-jaw and goggle-eye, the frog;
Dragons, owls, monkeys, beetles, geese;
Some crush-nosed human-hearted dog:
Queer names, too, such a catalogue!

III.

I thought "And he who owns the wealth
Which blocks the window's vastitude,

—Ah, could I peep at him by stealth
Behind his ware, pass shop, intrude
On house itself, what scenes were viewed!

IV.

"If wide and showy thus the shop,
What must the habitation prove?
The true house with no name a-top—
The mansion, distant one remove,
Once get him off his traffic-groove!

V.

"Pictures he likes, or books perhaps;
And as for buying most and best,
Commend me to these City chaps!
Or else he 's social, takes his rest
On Sundays, with a Lord for guest.

VI.

"Some suburb-palace, parked about
And gated grandly, built last year:
The four-mile walk to keep off gout;
Or big seat sold by bankrupt peer:
But then he takes the rail, that 's clear.

VII.

"Or, stop! I wager, taste selects
Some out o' the way, some all-unknown
Retreat: the neighbourhood suspects
Little that he who rambles lone
Makes Rothschild tremble on his throne!"

VIII.

Nowise! Nor Mayfair residence
Fit to receive and entertain,—
Nor Hampstead villa's kind defence
From noise and crowd, from dust and drain,—
Nor country-box was soul's domain!

IX.

Nowise! At back of all that spread
Of merchandize, woe 's me, I find
A hole i' the wall where, heels by head,
The owner couched, his ware behind,
—In cupboard suited to his mind.

X.

For why? He saw no use of life
But, while he drove a roaring trade,

To chuckle "Customers are rife!"
To chafe "So much hard cash outlaid
Yet zero in my profits made!

XI.

"This novelty costs pains, but—takes?
Cumbers my counter! Stock no more!
This article, no such great shakes,
Fizzes like wildfire? Underscore
The cheap thing—thousands to the fore!"

XII.

'T was lodging best to live most nigh
(Cramp, coffinlike as crib might be)
Receipt of Custom; ear and eye
Wanted no outworld: "Hear and see
The bustle in the shop!" quoth he.

XIII.

My fancy of a merchant-prince
Was different. Through his wares we groped
Our darkling way to—not to mince
The matter—no black den where moped
The master if we interloped!

XIV.

Shop was shop only: household-stuff?
What did he want with comforts there?
"Walls, ceiling, floor, stay blank and rough,
So goods on sale show rich and rare!
'*Sell and scud home*' be shop's affair!"

XV.

What might he deal in? Gems, suppose!
Since somehow business must be done
At cost of trouble,—see, he throws
You choice of jewels, everyone,
Good, better, best, star, moon and sun!

XVI.

Which lies within your power of purse?
This ruby that would tip aright
Solomon's sceptre? Oh, your nurse
Wants simply coral, the delight
Of teething baby,—stuff to bite!

XVII.

Howe'er your choice fell, straight you took
Your purchase, prompt your money rang

On counter,—scarce the man forsook
His study of the "Times," just swang
Till-ward his hand that stopped the clang,—

XVIII.

Then off made buyer with a prize,
Then seller to his "Times" returned
And so did day wear, wear, till eyes
Brightened apace, for rest was earned:
He locked door long ere candle burned.

XIX.

And whither went he? Ask himself,
Not me! To change of scene, I think.
Once sold the ware and pursed the pelf,
Chaffer was scarce his meat and drink,
Nor all his music—money-chink.

XX.

Because a man has shop to mind
In time and place, since flesh must live,
Needs spirit lack all life behind,
All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,
All loves except what trade can give?

XXI.

I want to know a butcher paints,
A baker rhymes for his pursuit,
Candlestick-maker much acquaints
His soul with song, or, haply mute,
Blows out his brains upon the flute!

XXII.

But—shop each day and all day long!
Friend, your good angel slept, your star
Suffered eclipse, fate did you wrong!
From where these sorts of treasures are,
There should our hearts be—Christ, how far!

PISGAH-SIGHTS. I.

1876.

I.

Over the ball of it,
  Peering and prying,
How I see all of it,
  Life there, outlying!
Roughness and smoothness,
  Shine and defilement,
Grace and uncouthness:
  One reconcilement.

II.

Orbed as appointed,
  Sister with brother
Joins, ne'er disjointed
  One from the other.

All 's lend-and-borrow;
Good, see, wants evil,
Joy demands sorrow,
Angel weds devil!

III.

"Which things must—*why* be?"
Vain our endeavour!
So shall things aye be
As they were ever.
"Such things should *so* be!"
Sage our desistence!
Rough-smooth let globe be,
Mixed—man's existence!

IV.

Man—wise and foolish,
Lover and scorner,
Docile and mulish—
Keep each his corner!
Honey yet gall of it!
There 's the life lying,
And I see all of it,
Only, I 'm dying!

PISGAH-SIGHTS. II.

1876.

I.

Could I but live again,
  Twice my life over,
Would I once strive again?
  Would not I cover
Quietly all of it—
  Greed and ambition—
So, from the pall of it,
  Pass to fruition?

II.

"Soft!" I 'd say, "Soul mine!
  Three-score and ten years,
Let the blind mole mine
  Digging out deniers!

Let the dazed hawk soar,
  Claim the sun's rights too!
Turf 't is thy walk 's o'er,
  Foliage thy flight 's to."

III.

Only a learner,
  Quick one or slow one,
Just a discerner,
  I would teach no one.
I am earth's native:
  No rearranging it!
I be creative,
  Chopping and changing it?

IV.

March, men, my fellows!
  Those who, above me,
(Distance so mellows)
  Fancy you love me:
Those who, below me,
  (Distance makes great so)
Free to forego me,
  Fancy you hate so!

V.

Praising, reviling,
  Worst head and best head,
Past me defiling,
  Never arrested,
Wanters, abounders,
  March, in gay mixture,
Men, my surrounders!
  I am the fixture.

VI.

So shall I fear thee,
  Mightiness yonder!
Mock-sun—more near thee,
  What is to wonder?
So shall I love thee,
  Down in the dark,—lest
Glowworm I prove thee,
  Star that now sparklest!

FEARS AND SCRUPLES.

1876.

I.

HERE 's my case. Of old I used to love him
This same unseen friend, before I knew:
Dream there was none like him, none above him,—
Wake to hope and trust my dream was true.

II.

Loved I not his letters full of beauty?
Not his actions famous far and wide?
Absent, he would know I vowed him duty;
Present, he would find me at his side.

III.

Pleasant fancy! for I had but letters,
Only knew of actions by hearsay:
He himself was busied with my betters;
What of that? My turn must come some day.

IV.

"Some day" proving—no day! Here 's the puzzle.
Passed and passed my turn is. Why complain?
He 's so busied! If I could but muzzle
People's foolish mouths that give me pain!

V.

"Letters?" (hear them!) "You a judge of writing?
Ask the experts!—How they shake the head
O'er these characters, your friend's inditing—
Call them forgery from A to Z!

VI.

"Actions? Where 's your certain proof" (they bother)
"He, of all you find so great and good,
He, he only, claims this, that, the other
Action—claimed by men, a multitude?"

VII.

I can simply wish I might refute you,
Wish my friend would,—by a word, a wink,—
Bid me stop that foolish mouth,—you brute you!
He keeps absent,—why, I cannot think.

VIII.

Never mind! Though foolishness may flout me,
One thing 's sure enough: 't is neither frost,
No, nor fire, shall freeze or burn from out me
Thanks for truth—though falsehood, gained—though lost.

IX.

All my days, I 'll go the softlier, sadlier,
For that dream's sake! How forget the thrill
Through and through me as I thought "The gladlier
Lives my friend because I love him still!"

X.

Ah, but there 's a menace someone utters!
"What and if your friend at home play tricks?
Peep at hide-and-seek behind the shutters?
Mean your eyes should pierce through solid bricks?

XI.

"What and if he, frowning, wake you, dreamy?
Lay on you the blame that bricks—conceal?
Say '*At least I saw who did not see me,*
Does see now, and presently shall feel'?"

XII.

"Why, that makes your friend a monster!" say you:
"Had his house no window? At first nod,
Would you not have hailed him?" Hush, I pray you!
What if this friend happen to be—God?

NATURAL MAGIC.

1876.

I.

All I can say is—I saw it!
The room was as bare as your hand.
I locked in the swarth little lady,—I swear,
From the head to the foot of her—well, quite as bare!
"No Nautch shall cheat me," said I, "taking my stand
At this bolt which I draw!" And this bolt—I withdraw it,
And there laughs the lady, not bare, but embowered
With—who knows what verdure, o'erfruited, o'erflowered?
Impossible! Only—I saw it!

II.

All I can sing is—I feel it!
This life was as blank as that room;
I let you pass in here. Precaution, indeed?
Walls, ceiling and floor,—not a chance for a weed!

Wide opens the entrance: where 's cold now, where 's
gloom?
No May to sow seed here, no June to reveal it,
Behold you enshrined in these blooms of your bringing,
These fruits of your bearing—nay, birds of your
winging!
A fairy-tale! Only—I feel it!

MAGICAL NATURE.

1876.

I.

Flower—I never fancied, jewel—I profess you!
Bright I see and soft I feel the outside of a flower.
Save but glow inside and—jewel, I should guess you,
Dim to sight and rough to touch: the glory is the dower.

II.

You, forsooth, a flower? Nay, my love, a jewel—
Jewel at no mercy of a moment in your prime!
Time may fray the flower-face: kind be time or cruel,
Jewel, from each facet, flash your laugh at time!

BIFURCATION.

1876.

We were two lovers; let me lie by her,
My tomb beside her tomb. On hers inscribe—
"I loved him; but my reason bade prefer
Duty to love, reject the tempter's bribe
Of rose and lily when each path diverged,
And either I must pace to life's far end
As love should lead me, or, as duty urged,
Plod the worn causeway arm-in-arm with friend.
So, truth turned falsehood: '*How I loathe a flower,*
How prize the pavement!' still caressed his ear—
The deafish friend's—through life's day, hour by hour,
As he laughed (coughing) '*Ay, it would appear!*'
But deep within my heart of hearts there hid
Ever the confidence, amends for all,
That heaven repairs what wrong earth's journey did,
When love from life-long exile comes at call.
Duty and love, one broadway, were the best—
Who doubts? But one or other was to choose.

I chose the darkling half, and wait the rest
In that new world where light and darkness fuse."

Inscribe on mine—"I loved her: love's track lay
O'er sand and pebble, as all travellers know.
Duty led through a smiling country, gay
With greensward where the rose and lily blow.
'*Our roads are diverse: farewell, love!*' said she;
''*T is duty I abide by: homely sward*
And not the rock-rough picturesque for me!
Above, where both roads join, I wait reward.
Be you as constant to the path whereon
I leave you planted!' But man needs must move,
Keep moving—whither, when the star is gone
Whereby he steps secure nor strays from love?
No stone but I was tripped by, stumbling-block
But brought me to confusion. Where I fell,
There I lay flat, if moss disguised the rock,
Thence, if flint pierced, I rose and cried '*All's well!*
Duty be mine to tread in that high sphere
Where love from duty ne'er disparts, I trust,
And two halves make that whole, whereof—since here
One must suffice a man—why, this one must!'"

Inscribe each tomb thus: then, some sage acquaint
The simple—which holds sinner, which holds saint!

NUMPHOLEPTOS.

1876.

STILL you stand, still you listen, still you smile!
Still melts your moonbeam through me, white awhile,
Softening, sweetening, till sweet and soft
Increase so round this heart of mine, that oft
I could believe your moonbeam-smile has past
The pallid limit, lies, transformed at last
To sunlight and salvation—warms the soul
It sweetens, softens! Would you pass that goal,
Gain love's birth at the limit's happier verge,
And, where an iridescence lurks, but urge
The hesitating pallor on to prime
Of dawn!—true blood-streaked, sun-warmth, action-time,
By heart-pulse ripened to a ruddy glow
Of gold above my clay—I scarce should know
From gold's self, thus suffused! For gold means love.
What means the sad slow silver smile above
My clay but pity, pardon?—at the best,
But acquiescence that I take my rest,

Contented to be clay, while in your heaven
The sun reserves love for the Spirit-Seven
Companioning God's throne they lamp before,
—Leaves earth a mute waste only wandered o'er
By that pale soft sweet disempassioned moon
Which smiles me slow forgiveness! Such the boon
I beg? Nay, dear, submit to this—just this
Supreme endeavour! As my lips now kiss
Your feet, my arms convulse your shrouding robe,
My eyes, acquainted with the dust, dare probe
Your eyes above for—what, if born, would blind
Mine with redundant bliss, as flash may find
The inert nerve, sting awake the palsied limb,
Bid with life's ecstasy sense overbrim
And suck back death in the resurging joy—
Love, the love whole and sole without alloy!

Vainly! The promise withers! I employ
Lips, arms, eyes, pray the prayer which finds the word,
Make the appeal which must be felt, not heard,
And none the more is changed your calm regard:
Rather, its sweet and soft grow harsh and hard—
Forbearance, then repulsion, then disdain.
Avert the rest! I rise, see!—make, again
Once more, the old departure for some track
Untried yet through a world which brings me back

Ever thus fruitlessly to find your feet,
To fix your eyes, to pray the soft and sweet
Which smile there—take from his new pilgrimage
Your outcast, once your inmate, and assuage
With love—not placid pardon now—his thirst
For a mere drop from out the ocean erst
He drank at! Well, the quest shall be renewed.
Fear nothing! Though I linger, unembued
With any drop, my lips thus close. I go!
So did I leave you, I have found you so,
And doubtlessly, if fated to return,
So shall my pleading persevere and earn
Pardon—not love—in that same smile, I learn,
And lose the meaning of, to learn once more,
Vainly!

What fairy track do I explore?
What magic hall return to, like the gem
Centuply-angled o'er a diadem?
You dwell there, hearted; from your midmost home
Rays forth—through that fantastic world I roam
Ever—from centre to circumference,
Shaft upon coloured shaft: this crimsons thence,
That purples out its precinct through the waste.
Surely I had your sanction when I faced,
Fared forth upon that untried yellow ray

Whence I retrack my steps? They end to-day
Where they began—before your feet, beneath
Your eyes, your smile: the blade is shut in sheath,
Fire quenched in flint; irradiation, late
Triumphant through the distance, finds its fate,
Merged in your blank pure soul, alike the source
And tomb of that prismatic glow: divorce
Absolute, all-conclusive! Forth I fared,
Treading the lambent flamelet: little cared
If now its flickering took the topaz tint,
If now my dull-caked path gave sulphury hint
Of subterranean rage—no stay nor stint
To yellow, since you sanctioned that I bathe,
Burnish me, soul and body, swim and swathe
In yellow license. Here I reek suffused
With crocus, saffron, orange, as I used
With scarlet, purple, every dye o' the bow
Born of the storm-cloud. As before, you show
Scarce recognition, no approval, some
Mistrust, more wonder at a man become
Monstrous in garb, nay—flesh disguised as well,
Through his adventure. Whatsoe'er befell,
I followed, whereso'er it wound, that vein
You authorized should leave your whiteness, stain
Earth's sombre stretch beyond your midmost place
Of vantage,—trode that tinct whereof the trace

On garb and flesh repel you! Yes, I plead
Your own permission—your command, indeed,
That who would worthily retain the love
Must share the knowledge shrined those eyes above,
Go boldly on adventure, break through bounds
O' the quintessential whiteness that surrounds
Your feet, obtain experience of each tinge
That bickers forth to broaden out, impinge
Plainer his foot its pathway all distinct
From every other. Ah, the wonder, linked
With fear, as exploration manifests
What agency it was first tipped the crests
Of unnamed wildflower, soon protruding grew
Portentous mid the sands, as when his hue
Betrays him and the burrowing snake gleams through;
Till, last . . . but why parade more shame and pain?
Are not the proofs upon me? Here again
I pass into your presence, I receive
Your smile of pity, pardon, and I leave . . .
No, not this last of times I leave you, mute,
Submitted to my penance, so my foot
May yet again adventure, tread, from source
To issue, one more ray of rays which course
Each other, at your bidding, from the sphere
Silver and sweet, their birthplace, down that drear
Dark of the world,—you promise shall return

Your pilgrim jewelled as with drops o' the urn
The rainbow paints from, and no smatch at all
Of ghastliness at edge of some cloud-pall
Heaven cowers before, as earth awaits the fall
O' the bolt and flash of doom. Who trusts your word
Tries the adventure: and returns—absurd
As frightful—in that sulphur-steeped disguise
Mocking the priestly cloth-of-gold, sole prize
The arch-heretic was wont to bear away
Until he reached the burning. No, I say:
No fresh adventure! No more seeking love
At end of toil, and finding, calm above
My passion, the old statuesque regard,
The sad petrific smile!

O you—less hard
And hateful than mistaken and obtuse
Unreason of a she-intelligence!
You very woman with the pert pretence
To match the male achievement! Like enough!
Ay, you were easy victors, did the rough
Straightway efface itself to smooth, the gruff
Grind down and grow a whisper,—did man's truth
Subdue, for sake of chivalry and ruth,
Its rapier-edge to suit the bulrush-spear
Womanly falsehood fights with! O that ear

All fact pricks rudely, that thrice-superfine
Feminity of sense, with right divine
To waive all process, take result stain-free
From out the very muck wherein . . .

Ah me!
The true slave's querulous outbreak! All the rest
Be resignation! Forth at your behest
I fare. Who knows but this—the crimson-quest—
May deepen to a sunrise, not decay
To that cold sad sweet smile?—which I obey.

APPEARANCES.

1876

I.

And so you found that poor room dull,
Dark, hardly to your taste, my dear?
Its features seemed unbeautiful:
But this I know—'t was there, not here,
You plighted troth to me, the word
Which—ask that poor room how it heard

II.

And this rich room obtains your praise
Unqualified,—so bright, so fair,
So all whereat perfection stays?
Ay, but remember—here, not there,
The other word was spoken! Ask
This rich room how you dropped the mask

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER.

1876.

I.

No protesting, dearest!
  Hardly kisses even!
    Don't we both know how it ends?
How the greenest leaf turns serest,
  Bluest outbreak—blankest heaven,
    Lovers—friends?

II.

You would build a mansion,
  I would weave a bower
    —Want the heart for enterprise.
Walls admit of no expansion:
  Trellis-work may haply flower
    Twice the size.

III.

What makes glad Life's Winter?
New buds, old blooms after.
Sad the sighing "How suspect
Beams would ere mid-Autumn splinter,
Rooftree scarce support a rafter,
Walls lie wrecked?"

IV.

You are young, my princess!
I am hardly older:
Yet—I steal a glance behind.
Dare I tell you what convinces
Timid me that you, if bolder,
Bold—are blind?

V.

Where we plan our dwelling
Glooms a graveyard surely!
Headstone, footstone moss may drape,—
Name, date, violets hide from spelling,—
But, though corpses rot obscurely,
Ghosts escape.

VI.

Ghosts! O breathing Beauty,
Give my frank word pardon!
What if I—somehow, somewhere—
Pledged my soul to endless duty
Many a time and oft? Be hard on
Love—laid there?

VII.

Nay, blame grief that 's fickle,
Time that proves a traitor,
Chance, change, all that purpose warps,—
Death who spares to thrust the sickle
Laid Love low, through flowers which later
Shroud the corpse!

VIII.

And you, my winsome lady,
Whisper with like frankness!
Lies nothing buried long ago?
Are yon—which shimmer mid the shady
Where moss and violet run to rankness—
Tombs or no?

IX.

Who taxes you with murder?
My hands are clean—or nearly!
Love being mortal needs must pass.
Repentance? Nothing were absurder.
Enough: we felt Love's loss severely;
Though now—alas!

X.

Love's corpse lies quiet therefore,
Only Love's ghost plays truant,
And warns us have in wholesome awe
Durable mansionry; that 's wherefore
I weave but trellis-work, pursuant
—Life, to law.

XI.

The solid, not the fragile,
Tempts rain and hail and thunder.
If bower stand firm at Autumn's close,
Beyond my hope,—why, boughs were agile;
If bower fall flat, we scarce need wonder
Wreathing—rose!

XII.

So, truce to the protesting,
  So, muffled be the kisses!
    For, would we but avow the truth,
Sober is genuine joy. No jesting!
  Ask else Penelope, Ulysses—
    Old in youth!

XIII.

For why should ghosts feel angered?
  Let all their interference
    Be faint march-music in the air!
"Up! Join the rear of us the vanguard!
  Up, lovers, dead to all appearance,
    Laggard pair!"

XIV.

The while you clasp me closer,
  The while I press you deeper,
    As safe we chuckle,—under breath,
Yet all the slyer, the jocoser,—
  "So, life can boast its day, like leap-year,
    Stolen from death!"

XV.

Ah me—the sudden terror!
Hence quick—avaunt, avoid me,
You cheat, the ghostly flesh-disguised!
Nay, all the ghosts in one! Strange error!
So, 't was Death's self that clipped and coyed me,
Loved—and lied!

XVI.

Ay, dead loves are the potent!
Like any cloud they used you,
Mere semblance you, but substance they!
Build we no mansion, weave we no tent!
Mere flesh—their spirit interfused you!
Hence, I say!

XVII.

All theirs, none yours the glamour!
Theirs each low word that won me,
Soft look that found me Love's, and left
What else but you—the tears and clamour
That 's all your very own! Undone me—
Ghost-bereft!

HERVE RIEL.

1876.

I.

On the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred ninety-two,
Did the English fight the French,—woe to France!
And, the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter through the blue,
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to Saint-Malo on the Rance,
With the English fleet in view.

II.

'T was the squadron that escaped, with the victor in full chase;
First and foremost of the drove, in his great ship, Damfreville;
Close on him fled, great and small,
Twenty-two good ships in all;

And they signalled to the place
"Help the winners of a race!
Get us guidance, give us harbour, take us quick—
or, quicker still,
Here 's the English can and will!"

III.

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and leapt on board;
"Why, what hope or chance have ships like these to pass?" laughed they:
"Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the passage scarred and scored,—
Shall the 'Formidable' here, with her twelve and eighty guns,
Think to make the river-mouth by the single narrow way,
Trust to enter—where 't is ticklish for a craft of twenty tons,
And with flow at full beside?
Now, 't is slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring? Rather say,
While rock stands or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay!"

IV.

Then was called a council straight.
Brief and bitter the debate:
"Here's the English at our heels; would you have
them take in tow
All that's left us of the fleet, linked together stern
and bow,
For a prize to Plymouth Sound?
Better run the ships aground!"
(Ended Damfreville his speech).
"Not a minute more to wait!
Let the Captains all and each
Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on
the beach!
France must undergo her fate.

V.

Give the word!" But no such word
Was ever spoke or heard;
For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all
these
—A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate—first, second,
third?
No such man of mark, and meet
With his betters to compete!

But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville for the fleet,
A poor coasting-pilot he, Hervé Riel the Croisickese.

VI.

And "What mockery or malice have we here?" cries Hervé Riel:
"Are you mad, you Malouins? Are you cowards, fools, or rogues?
Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took the soundings, tell
On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every swell
'Twixt the offing here and Grève where the river disembogues?
Are you bought by English gold? Is it love the lying 's for?
Morn and eve, night and day,
Have I piloted your bay,
Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of Solidor.
Burn the fleet and ruin France? That were worse than fifty Hogues!
Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs, believe me there 's a way!
Only let me lead the line,

Have the biggest ship to steer,
Get this 'Formidable' clear,
Make the others follow mine,
And I lead them, most and least, by a passage I know well,
Right to Solidor past Grève,
And there lay them safe and sound;
And if one ship misbehave,—
—Keel so much as grate the ground,
Why, I 've nothing but my life,—here 's my head!" cries Hervé Riel.

VII.

Not a minute more to wait.
"Steer us in, then, small and great!
Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron!" cried its chief.
Captains, give the sailor place!
He is Admiral, in brief.
Still the north-wind, by God's grace
See the noble fellow's face
As the big ship, with a bound,
Clears the entry like a hound,
Keeps the passage, as its inch of way were the wide sea's profound!

See, safe thro' shoal and rock,
How they follow in a flock,
Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the ground,
Not a spar that comes to grief!
The peril, see, is past.
All are harboured to the last,
And just as Hervé Riel hollas "Anchor!"—sure as fate,
Up the English come,—too late!

VIII.

So, the storm subsides to calm:
They see the green trees wave
On the heights o'erlooking Grève.
Hearts that bled are stanched with balm.
"Just our rapture to enhance,
Let the English rake the bay,
Gnash their teeth and glare askance
As they cannonade away!
'Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on the Rance!"
How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's countenance!
Out burst all with one accord,
"This is Paradise for Hell!

Let France, let France's King
Thank the man that did the thing!"
What a shout, and all one word,
"Hervé Riel!"
As he stepped in front once more,
Not a symptom of surprise
In the frank blue Breton eyes,
Just the same man as before.

IX.

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
I must speak out at the end,
Though I find the speaking hard.
Praise is deeper than the lips:
You have saved the King his ships,
You must name your own reward.
'Faith, our sun was near eclipse!
Demand whate'er you will,
France remains your debtor still.
Ask to heart's content and have! or my name 's
not Damfreville."

X.

Then a beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,

As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue:
"Since I needs must say my say,
Since on board the duty's done,
And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it but a run?—
Since 't is ask and have, I may—
Since the others go ashore—
Come! A good whole holiday!
Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle Aurore!"
That he asked and that he got,—nothing more.

XI.

Name and deed alike are lost:
Not a pillar nor a post
In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;
Not a head in white and black
On a single fishing-smack,
In memory of the man but for whom had gone to wrack
All that France saved from the fight whence England bore the bell.
Go to Paris: rank on rank
Search the heroes flung pell-mell
On the Louvre, face and flank!

You shall look long enough ere you come to Hervé Riel.

So, for better and for worse,
Hervé Riel, accept my verse!
In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honour France, love thy wife the Belle Aurore!

A FORGIVENESS.

1876.

I AM indeed the personage you know.
As for my wife,—what happened long ago,—
You have a right to question me, as I
Am bound to answer.

("Son, a fit reply!"
The monk half spoke, half ground through his clenched teeth,
At the confession-grate I knelt beneath.)

Thus then all happened, Father! Power and place
I had as still I have. I ran life's race,
With the whole world to see, as only strains
His strength some athlete whose prodigious gains
Of good appal him: happy to excess,—
Work freely done should balance happiness

Fully enjoyed; and, since beneath my roof
Housed she who made home heaven, in heaven's behoof
I went forth every day, and all day long
Worked for the world. Look, how the labourer's song
Cheers him! Thus sang my soul, at each sharp throe
Of labouring flesh and blood—"She loves me so!"

One day, perhaps such song so knit the nerve
That work grew play and vanished. "I deserve
Haply my heaven an hour before the time!"
I laughed, as silverly the clockhouse-chime
Surprised me passing through the postern-gate
—Not the main entry where the menials wait
And wonder why the world's affairs allow
The master sudden leisure. That was how
I took the private garden-way for once.

Forth from the alcove, I saw start, ensconce
Himself behind the porphyry vase, a man.

My fancies in the natural order ran:
"A spy,—perhaps a foe in ambuscade,—
A thief,—more like, a sweetheart of some maid
Who pitched on the alcove for tryst perhaps."

"Stand there!" I bid.

Whereat my man but wraps
His face the closelier with uplifted arm
Whereon the cloak lies, strikes in blind alarm
This and that pedestal as,—stretch and stoop,—
Now in, now out of sight, he thrids the group
Of statues, marble god and goddess ranged
Each side the pathway, till the gate 's exchanged
For safety: one step thence, the street, you know!

Thus far I followed with my gaze. Then, slow,
Near on admiringly, I breathed again,
And—back to that last fancy of the train—
"A danger risked for hope of just a word
With—which of all my nest may be the bird
This poacher covets for her plumage, pray?
Carmen? Juana? Carmen seems too gay
For such adventure, while Juana 's grave
—Would scorn the folly. I applaud the knave!
He had the eye, could single from my brood
His proper fledgeling!"

As I turned, there stood
In face of me, my wife stone-still stone-white.
Whether one bound had brought her,—at first sight
Of what she judged the encounter, sure to be

Next moment, of the venturous man and me,—
Brought her to clutch and keep me from my prey:
Whether impelled because her death no day
Could come so absolutely opportune
As now at joy's height, like a year in June
Stayed at the fall of its first ripened rose:
Or whether hungry for my hate—who knows?—
Eager to end an irksome lie, and taste
Our tingling true relation, hate embraced
By hate one naked moment:—anyhow
There stone-still stone-white stood my wife, but now
The woman who made heaven within my house.
Ay, she who faced me was my very spouse
As well as love—you are to recollect!

"Stay!" she said. "Keep at least one soul unspecked
With crime, that 's spotless hitherto—your own!
Kill me who court the blessing, who alone
Was, am, and shall be guilty, first to last!
The man lay helpless in the toils I cast
About him, helpless as the statue there
Against that strangling bell-flower's bondage: tear
Away and tread to dust the parasite,
But do the passive marble no despite!
I love him as I hate you. Kill me! Strike
At one blow both infinitudes alike

Out of existence—hate and love! Whence love?
That 's safe inside my heart, nor will remove
For any searching of your steel, I think.
Whence hate? The secret lay on lip, at brink
Of speech, in one fierce tremble to escape,
At every form wherein your love took shape,
At each new provocation of your kiss.
Kill me!"

We went in.

Next day after this,
I felt as if the speech might come. I spoke—
Easily, after all.

"The lifted cloak
Was screen sufficient: I concern myself
Hardly with laying hands on who for pelf—
Whate'er the ignoble kind—may prowl and brave
Cuffing and kicking proper to a knave
Detected by my household's vigilance.
Enough of such! As for my love-romance—
I, like our good Hidalgo, rub my eyes
And wake and wonder how the film could rise
Which changed for me a barber's basin straight
Into—Mambrino's helm? I hesitate
Nowise to say—God's sacramental cup!

Why should I blame the brass which, burnished up,
Will blaze, to all but me, as good as gold?
To me—a warning I was overbold
In judging metals. The Hidalgo waked
Only to die, if I remember,—staked
His life upon the basin's worth, and lost:
While I confess torpidity at most
In here and there a limb; but, lame and halt,
Still should I work on, still repair my fault
Ere I took rest in death,—no fear at all!
Now, work —no word before the curtain fall!"

The "curtain"? That of death on life, I meant:
My "word," permissible in death's event,
Would be—truth, soul to soul; for, otherwise,
Day by day, three years long, there had to rise
And, night by night, to fall upon our stage—
Ours, doomed to public play by heritage—
Another curtain, when the world, perforce
Our critical assembly, in due course
Came and went, witnessing, gave praise or blame
To art-mimetic. It had spoiled the game
If, suffered to set foot behind our scene,
The world had witnessed how stage-king and queen,
Gallant and lady, but a minute since
Enarming each the other, would evince

No sign of recognition as they took
His way and her way to whatever nook
Waited them in the darkness either side
Of that bright stage where lately groom and bride
Had fired the audience to a frenzy-fit
Of sympathetic rapture—every whit
Earned as the curtain fell on her and me,
—Actors. Three whole years, nothing was to see
But calm and concord; where a speech was due
There came the speech: when smiles were wanted too
Smiles were as ready. In a place like mine,
Where foreign and domestic cares combine,
There 's audience every day and all day long;
But finally the last of the whole throng
Who linger lets one see his back. For her—
Why, liberty and liking: I aver,
Liking and liberty! For me—I breathed,
Let my face rest from every wrinkle wreathed
Smile-like about the mouth, unlearned my task
Of personation till next day bade mask,
And quietly betook me from that world
To the real world, not pageant: there unfurled
In work, its wings, my soul, the fretted power.
Three years I worked, each minute of each hour
Not claimed by acting:—work I may dispense
With talk about, since work in evidence.

Perhaps in history; who knows or cares?

After three years, this way, all unawares,
Our acting ended. She and I, at close
Of a loud night-feast, led, between two rows
Of bending male and female loyalty,
Our lord the king down staircase, while, held high
At arm's length did the twisted tapers' flare
Herald his passage from our palace, where
Such visiting left glory evermore.
Again the ascent in public, till at door
As we two stood by the saloon—now blank
And disencumbered of its guests—there sank
A whisper in my ear, so low and yet
So unmistakable!

"I half forget
The chamber you repair to, and I want
Occasion for one short word—if you grant
That grace—within a certain room you called
Our 'Study,' for you wrote there while I scrawled
Some paper full of faces for my sport.
That room I can remember. Just one short
Word with you there, for the remembrance' sake!"

"Follow me thither!" I replied.

We break
The gloom a little, as with guiding lamp
I lead the way, leave warmth and cheer, by damp
Blind disused serpentining ways afar
From where the habitable chambers are,—
Ascend, descend stairs tunnelled through the stone,—
Always in silence,—till I reach the lone
Chamber sepulchred for my very own
Out of the palace-quarry. When a boy,
Here was my fortress, stronghold from annoy,
Proof-positive of ownership; in youth
I garnered up my gleanings here—uncouth
But precious relics of vain hopes, vain fears;
Finally, this became in after years
My closet of entrenchment to withstand
Invasion of the foe on every hand—
The multifarious herd in bower and hall,
State-room,—rooms whatsoe'er the style, which call
On masters to be mindful that, before
Men, they must look like men and something more.
Here,—when our lord the king's bestowment ceased
T'o deck me on the day that, golden-fleeced,
I touched ambition's height,—'t was here, released
From glory (always symbolled by a chain!)
No sooner was I privileged to gain
My secret domicile than glad I flung

That last toy on the table—gazed where hung
On hook my father's gift, the arquebuss—
And asked myself "Shall I envisage thus
The new prize and the old prize, when I reach
Another year's experience?—own that each
Equalled advantage—sportsman's—statesman's tool?
That brought me down an eagle, this—a fool!"

Into which room on entry, I set down
The lamp, and turning saw whose rustled gown
Had told me my wife followed, pace for pace.
Each of us looked the other in the face.
She spoke. "Since I could die now . ."

(To explain
Why that first struck me, know—not once again
Since the adventure at the porphyry's edge
Three years before, which sundered like a wedge
Her soul from mine,—though daily, smile to smile,
We stood before the public,—all the while
Not once had I distinguished, in that face
I paid observance to, the faintest trace
Of feature more than requisite for eyes
To do their duty by and recognize:
So did I force mine to obey my will
And pry no further. There exists such skill,—

Those know who need it. What physician shrinks
From needful contact with a corpse? He drinks
No plague so long as thirst for knowledge—not
An idler impulse—prompts inquiry. What,
And will you disbelieve in power to bid
Our spirit back to bounds, as though we chid
A child from scrutiny that 's just and right
In manhood? Sense, not soul, accomplished
sight,
Reported daily she it was—not how
Nor why a change had come to cheek and brow.)

"Since I could die now of the truth concealed,
Yet dare not, must not die—so seems revealed
The Virgin's mind to me—for death means peace,
Wherein no lawful part have I, whose lease
Of life and punishment the truth avowed
May haply lengthen,—let me push the shroud
Away, that steals to muffle ere is just
My penance-fire in snow! I dare—I must
Live, by avowal of the truth—this truth—
I loved you! Thanks for the fresh serpent's tooth
That, by a prompt new pang more exquisite
Than all preceding torture, proves me right!
I loved you yet I lost you! May I go
Burn to the ashes, now my shame you know?"

I think there never was such—how express?—
Horror coquetting with voluptuousness,
As in those arms of Eastern workmanship—
Yataghan, kandjar, things that rend and rip,
Gash rough, slash smooth, help hate so many ways,
Yet ever keep a beauty that betrays
Love still at work with the artificer
Throughout his quaint devising. Why prefer,
Except for love's sake, that a blade should writhe
And bicker like a flame?—now play the scythe
As if some broad neck tempted,—now contract
And needle off into a fineness lacked
For just that puncture which the heart demands?
Then, such adornment! Wherefore need our hands
Enclose not ivory alone, nor gold
Roughened for use, but jewels? Nay, behold!
Fancy my favourite—which I seem to grasp
While I describe the luxury. No asp
Is diapered more delicate round throat
Than this below the handle! These denote
—These mazy lines meandering, to end
Only in flesh they open—what intend
They else but water-purlings—pale contrast
With the life-crimson where they blend at last?
And mark the handle's dim pellucid green,
Carved, the hard jadestone, as you pinch a bean,

Into a sort of parrot-bird! He pecks
A grape-bunch; his two eyes are ruby-specks
Pure from the mine: seen this way,—glassy blank,
But turn them,—lo the inmost fire, that shrank
From sparkling, sends a red dart right to aim!
Why did I choose such toys? Perhaps the game
Of peaceful men is warlike, just as men
War-wearied get amusement from that pen
And paper we grow sick of—statesfolk tired
Of merely (when such measures are required)
Dealing out doom to people by three words,
A signature and seal: we play with swords
Suggestive of quick process. That is how
I came to like the toys described you now,
Store of which glittered on the walls and strewed
The table, even, while my wife pursued
Her purpose to its ending. "Now you know
This shame, my three years' torture, let me go,
Burn to the very ashes! You—I lost,
Yet you—I loved!"

The thing I pity most
In men is—action prompted by surprise
Of anger: men? nay, bulls—whose onset lies
At instance of the firework and the goad!
Once the foe prostrate,—trampling once bestowed,—

Prompt follows placability, regret,
Atonement. Trust me, blood-warmth never yet
Betokened strong will! As no leap of pulse
Pricked me, that first time, so did none convulse
My veins at this occasion for resolve.
Had that devolved which did not then devolve
Upon me, I had done—what now to do
Was quietly apparent.

"Tell me who
The man was, crouching by the porphyry vase!"

"No, never! All was folly in his case,
All guilt in mine. I tempted, he complied."

"And yet you loved me?"

"Loved you. Double-dyed
In folly and in guilt, I thought you gave
Your heart and soul away from me to slave
At statecraft. Since my right in you seemed lost,
I stung myself to teach you, to your cost,
What you rejected could be prized beyond
Life, heaven, by the first fool I threw a fond
Look on, a fatal word to."

"And you still
Love me? Do I conjecture well or ill?"

"Conjecture—well or ill! I had three years
To spend in learning you."

"We both are peers
In knowledge, therefore: since three years are spent
Ere thus much of yourself *I* learn—who went
Back to the house, that day, and brought my mind
To bear upon your action, uncombined
Motive from motive, till the dross, deprived
Of every purer particle, survived
At last in native simple hideousness,
Utter contemptibility, nor less
Nor more. Contemptibility—exempt
How could I, from its proper due—contempt?
I have too much despised you to divert
My life from its set course by help or hurt
Of your all-despicable life—perturb
The calm, I work in, by—men's mouths to curb,
Which at such news were clamorous enough—
Men's eyes to shut before my broidered stuff
With the huge hole there, my emblazoned wall
Blank where a scutcheon hung,—by, worse than all,
Each day's procession, my paraded life

Robbed and impoverished through the wanting wife
—Now that my life (which means—my work) was grown
Riches indeed! Once, just this worth alone
Seemed work to have, that profit gained thereby
Of good and praise would how rewardingly!—
Fall at your feet,—a crown I hoped to cast
Before your love, my love should crown at last.
No love remaining to cast crown before,
My love stopped work now: but contempt the more
Impelled me task as ever head and hand,
Because the very fiends weave ropes of sand
Rather than taste pure hell in idleness.
Therefore I kept my memory down by stress
Of daily work I had no mind to stay
For the world's wonder at the wife away.
Oh, it was easy all of it, believe,
For I despised you! But your words retrieve
Importantly the past. No hate assumed
The mask of love at any time! There gloomed
A moment when love took hate's semblance, urged
By causes you declare; but love's self purged
Away a fancied wrong I did both loves
—Yours and my own: by no hate's help, it proves,
Purgation was attempted. Then, you rise
High by how many a grade! I did despise—
I do but hate you. Let hate's punishment

Replace contempt's! First step to which ascent—
Write down your own words I re-utter you!
'*I loved my husband and I hated—who*
He was, I took up as my first chance, mere
Mud-ball to fling and make love foul with!' Here
Lies paper!"

"Would my blood for ink suffice!"

"It may: this minion from a land of spice,
Silk, feather—every bird of jewelled breast—
This poignard's beauty, ne'er so lightly prest
Above your heart there . . ."

"Thus?"

"It flows, I see.
Dip there the point and write!"

"Dictate to me!
Nay, I remember."

And she wrote the words.
I read them. Then—"Since love, in you, affords
License for hate, in me, to quench (I say)
Contempt—why, hate itself has passed away.

In vengeance—foreign to contempt. Depart
Peacefully to that death which Eastern art
Imbued this weapon with, if tales be true!
Love will succeed to hate. I pardon you—
Dead in our chamber!"

True as truth the tale.
She died ere morning; then, I saw how pale
Her cheek was ere it wore day's paint-disguise,
And what a hollow darkened 'neath her eyes,
Now that I used my own. She sleeps, as erst
Beloved, in this your church: ay, yours!

Immersed
In thought so deeply, Father? Sad, perhaps?
For whose sake, hers or mine or his who wraps
—Still plain I seem to see!—about his head
The idle cloak,—about his heart (instead
Of cuirass) some fond hope he may elude
My vengeance in the cloister's solitude?
Hardly, I think! As little helped his brow
The cloak then, Father—as your grate helps now!

CENCIAJA.

1876.

Ogni cencio vuol entrare in bucato.—*Italian Proverb.*

May I print, Shelley, how it came to pass
That when your Beatrice seemed—by lapse
Of many a long month since her sentence fell—
Assured of pardon for the parricide,—
By intercession of staunch friends, or, say,
By certain pricks of conscience in the Pope
Conniver at Francesco Cenci's guilt,—
Suddenly all things changed and Clement grew
"Stern," as you state, "nor to be moved nor bent,
But said these three words coldly '*She must die;*
Subjoining '*Pardon? Paolo Santa Croce*
Murdered his mother also yestereve,
And he is fled: she shall not flee at least!'
—So, to the letter, sentence was fulfilled?
Shelley, may I condense verbosity
That lies before me, into some few words
Of English, and illustrate your superb

Achievement by a rescued anecdote,
No great things, only new and true beside?
As if some mere familiar of a house
Should venture to accost the group at gaze
Before its Titian, famed the wide world through,
And supplement such pictured masterpiece
By whisper "Searching in the archives here,
I found the reason of the Lady's fate,
And how by accident it came to pass
She wears the halo and displays the palm:
Who, haply, else had never suffered—no,
Nor graced our gallery, by consequence."
Who loved the work would like the little news:
Who lauds your poem lends an ear to me
Relating how the penalty was paid
By one Marchese dell' Oriolo, called
Onofrio Santa Croce otherwise,
For his complicity in matricide
With Paolo his own brother,—he whose crime
And flight induced "those three words—She must die."
Thus I unroll you then the manuscript.

"God's justice"—(of the multiplicity
Of such communications extant still,
Recording, each, injustice done by God
In person of his Vicar-upon-earth,

Scarce one but leads off to the self-same tune)—
"God's justice, tardy though it prove perchance,
Rests never on the track until it reach
Delinquency. In proof I cite the case
Of Paolo Santa Croce."

Many times
The youngster,—having been importunate
That Marchesine Costanza, who remained
His widowed mother, should supplant the heir
Her elder son, and substitute himself
In sole possession of her faculty,—
And meeting just as often with rebuff,—
Blinded by so exorbitant a lust
Of gold, the youngster straightway tasked his wits,
Casting about to kill the lady—thus.

He first, to cover his iniquity,
Writes to Onofrio Santa Croce, then
Authoritative lord, acquainting him
Their mother was contamination—wrought
Like hell-fire in the beauty of their House
By dissoluteness and abandonment
Of soul and body to impure delight.
Moreover, since she suffered from disease,
Those symptoms which her death made manifest

Hydroptic, he affirmed were fruits of sin
About to bring confusion and disgrace
Upon the ancient lineage and high fame
O' the family, when published. Duty bound,
He asked his brother—what a son should do?

Which when Marchese dell' Oriolo heard
By letter, being absent at his land
Oriolo, he made answer, this, no more:
"It must behove a son,—things haply so,—
To act as honour prompts a cavalier
And son, perform his duty to all three,
Mother and brothers"—here advice broke off.

By which advice informed and fortified,
As he professed himself—since bound by birth
To hear God's voice in primogeniture—
Paolo, who kept his mother company
In her domain Subiaco, straightway dared
His whole enormity of enterprise
And, falling on her, stabbed the lady dead;
Whose death demonstrated her innocence,
And happened,—by the way,—since Jesus Christ
Died to save man, just sixteen hundred years.
Costanza was of aspect beautiful
Exceedingly, and seemed, although in age

Sixty about, to far surpass her peers
The coëtaneous dames, in youth and grace.

Done the misdeed, its author takes to flight,
Foiling thereby the justice of the world:
Not God's however,—God, be sure, knows well
The way to clutch a culprit. Witness here!
The present sinner, when he least expects,
Snug-cornered somewhere i' the Basilicate,
Stumbles upon his death by violence.
A man of blood assaults a man of blood
And slays him somehow. This was afterward:
Enough, he promptly met with his deserts,
And, ending thus, permits we end with him,
And push forthwith to this important point—
His matricide fell out, of all the days,
Precisely when the law-procedure closed
Respecting Count Francesco Cenci's death
Chargeable on his daughter, sons and wife.
"Thus patricide was matched with matricide,"
A poet not inelegantly rhymed:
Nay, fratricide—those Princes Massimi!—
Which so disturbed the spirit of the Pope
That all the likelihood Rome entertained
Of Beatrice's pardon vanished straight,
And she endured the piteous death.

Now see
The sequel—what effect commandment had
For strict inquiry into this last case,
When Cardinal Aldobrandini (great
His efficacy—nephew to the Pope)
Was bidden crush—ay, though his very hand
Got soil i' the act—crime spawning everywhere!
Because, when all endeavour had been used
To catch the aforesaid Paolo, all in vain—
"Make perquisition" quoth our Eminence,
"Throughout his now deserted domicile!
Ransack the palace, roof and floor, to find
If haply any scrap of writing, hid
In nook or corner, may convict—who knows?—
Brother Onofrio of intelligence
With brother Paolo, as in brotherhood
Is but too likely: crime spawns everywhere."

And, every cranny searched accordingly,
There comes to light—O lynx-eyed Cardinal!—
Onofrio's unconsidered writing-scrap,
The letter in reply to Paolo's prayer,
The word of counsel that—things proving so,
Paolo should act the proper knightly part,
And do as was incumbent on a son,
A brother—and a man of birth, be sure!

Whereat immediately the officers
Proceeded to arrest Onofrio—found
At foot-ball, child's play, unaware of harm,
Safe with his friends, the Orsini, at their seat
Monte Giordano; as he left the house
He came upon the watch in wait for him
Set by the Barigel,—was caught and caged.

News of which capture being, that same hour,
Conveyed to Rome, forthwith our Eminence
Commands Taverna, Governor and Judge,
To have the process in especial care,
Be, first to last, not only president
In person, but inquisitor as well,
Nor trust the by-work to a substitute:
Bids him not, squeamish, keep the bench, but scrub
The floor of Justice, so to speak,—go try
His best in prison with the criminal:
Promising, as reward for by-work done
Fairly on all-fours, that, success obtained
And crime avowed, or such connivency
With crime as should procure a decent death—
Himself will humbly beg—which means, procure—
The Hat and Purple from his relative
The Pope, and so repay a diligence
Which, meritorious in the Cenci-case,

Mounts plainly here to Purple and the Hat.

Whereupon did my lord the Governor
So masterfully exercise the task
Enjoined him, that he, day by day, and week
By week, and month by month, from first to last
Toiled for the prize: now, punctual at his place,
Played Judge, and now, assiduous at his post,
Inquisitor—pressed cushion and scoured plank,
Early and late. Noon's fervour and night's chill,
Nought moved whom morn would, purpling, make amends!
So that observers laughed as, many a day,
He left home, in July when day is flame,
Posted to Tordinona-prison, plunged
Into a vault where daylong night is ice,
There passed his eight hours on a stretch, content,
Examining Onofrio: all the stress
Of all examination steadily
Converging into one pin-point,—he pushed
Tentative now of head and now of heart.
As when the nuthatch taps and tries the nut
This side and that side till the kernel sound,—
So did he press the sole and single point
—What was the very meaning of the phrase
'*Do as beseems an honoured cavalier*'?

Which one persistent question-torture,—plied
Day by day, week by week, and month by month,
Morn, noon and night,—fatigued away a mind
Grown imbecile by darkness, solitude,
And one vivacious memory gnawing there
As when a corpse is coffined with a snake:
—Fatigued Onofrio into what might seem
Admission that perchance his judgment groped
So blindly, feeling for an issue—aught
With semblance of an issue from the toils
Cast of a sudden round feet late so free,
He possibly might have envisaged, scarce
Recoiled from—even were the issue death
—Even her death whose life was death and worse!
Always provided that the charge of crime,
Each jot and tittle of the charge were true.
In such a sense, belike, he might advise
His brother to expurgate crime with . . . well,
With blood, if blood must follow on '*the course*
Taken as might beseem a cavalier.'

Whereupon process ended, and report
Was made without a minute of delay
To Clement who, because of those two crimes
O' the Massimi and Cenci flagrant late,
Must needs impatiently desire result

Result obtained, he bade the Governor
Summon the Congregation and despatch.
Summons made, sentence passed accordingly
—Death by beheading. When his death-decree
Was intimated to Onofrio, all
Man could do—that did he to save himself.
'T was much, the having gained for his defence
The Advocate o' the Poor, with natural help
Of many noble friendly persons fain
To disengage a man of family,
So young too, from his grim entanglement:
But Cardinal Aldobrandini ruled
There must be no diversion of the law.
Justice is justice, and the magistrate
Bears not the sword in vain. Who sins must die.

So, the Marchese had his head cut off,
With Rome to see, a concourse infinite,
In Place Saint Angelo beside the Bridge:
Where, demonstrating magnanimity
Adequate to his birth and breed,—poor boy!—
He made the people the accustomed speech,
Exhorted them to true faith, honest works,
And special good behaviour as regards
A parent of no matter what the sex,
Bidding each son take warning from himself.

Truly, it was considered in the boy
Stark staring lunacy, no less, to snap
So plain a bait, be hooked and hauled ashore
By such an angler as the Cardinal!
Why make confession of his privity
To Paolo's enterprise? Mere sealing lips—
Or, better, saying "When I counselled him
'*To do as might beseem a cavalier*,'
What could I mean but '*Hide our parent's shame*
As Christian ought, by aid of Holy Church!
Bury it in a convent—ay, beneath
Enough dotation to prevent its ghost
From troubling earth!'" Mere saying thus,—'t is plain,
Not only were his life the recompense,
But he had manifestly proved himself
True Christian, and in lieu of punishment
Got praise of all men. So the populace.

Anyhow, when the Pope made promise good
(That of Aldobrandini, near and dear)
And gave Taverna, who had toiled so much,
A Cardinal's equipment, some such word
As this from mouth to ear went saucily:
"Taverna's cap is dyed in what he drew
From Santa Croce's veins!" So joked the world.

I add: Onofrio left one child behind,
A daughter named Valeria, dowered with grace
Abundantly of soul and body, doomed
To life the shorter for her father's fate.
By death of her, the Marquisate returned
To that Orsini House from whence it came:
Oriolo having passed as donative
To Santa Croce from their ancestors.

And no word more? By all means! Would you know
The authoritative answer, when folk urged
"What made Aldobrandini, hound-like staunch,
Hunt out of life a harmless simpleton?"
The answer was—"Hatred implacable,
By reason they were rivals in their love."
The Cardinal's desire was to a dame
Whose favour was Onofrio's. Pricked with pride,
The simpleton must ostentatiously
Display a ring, the Cardinal's love-gift,
Given to Onofrio as the lady's gage;
Which ring on finger, as he put forth hand
To draw a tapestry, the Cardinal
Saw and knew, gift and owner, old and young;
Whereon a fury entered him—the fire
He quenched with what could quench fire only—blood.

Nay, more: "there want not who affirm to boot,
The unwise boy, a certain festal eve,
Feigned ignorance of who the wight might be
That pressed too closely on him with a crowd.
He struck the Cardinal a blow: and then,
To put a face upon the incident,
Dared next day, smug as ever, go pay court
I' the Cardinal's antechamber. Mark and mend,
Ye youth, by this example how may greed
Vainglorious operate in worldly souls!"

So ends the chronicler, beginning with
"God's justice, tardy though it prove perchance,
Rests never till it reach delinquency."
Ay, or how otherwise had come to pass
That Victor rules, this present year, in Rome?

FILIPPO BALDINUCCI ON THE PRIVILEGE OF BURIAL.

A REMINISCENCE OF A.D. 1676.

1876.

I.

"No, boy, we must not"—so began
My Uncle (he 's with God long since)
A-petting me, the good old man!
"We must not"—and he seemed to wince,
And lost that laugh whereto had grown
His chuckle at my piece of news,
How cleverly I aimed my stone—
"I fear we must not pelt the Jews!

II.

"When I was young indeed,—ah, faith
Was young and strong in Florence too!
We Christians never dreamed of scathe
Because we cursed or kicked the crew.

But now—well, well! The olive-crops
Weighed double then, and Arno's pranks
Would always spare religious shops
Whenever he o'erflowed his banks!

III.

"I 'll tell you"—and his eye regained
Its twinkle—"tell you something choice!
Something may help you keep unstained
Your honest zeal to stop the voice
Of unbelief with stone-throw—spite
Of laws, which modern fools enact,
That we must suffer Jews in sight
Go wholly unmolested! Fact!

IV.

"There was, then, in my youth, and yet
Is, by our San Frediano, just
Below the Blessed Olivet,
A wayside ground wherein they thrust
Their dead,—these Jews,—the more our shame!
Except that, so they will but die,
Christians perchance incur no blame
In giving hogs a hoist to stye.

V.

"There, anyhow, Jews stow away
Their dead; and,—such their insolence,—
Slink at odd times to sing and pray
As Christians do—all make-pretence!—
Which wickedness they perpetrate
Because they think no Christians see.
They reckoned here, at any rate,
Without their host: ha, ha, he, he!

VI.

"For, what should join their plot of ground
But a good Farmer's Christian field?
The Jews had hedged their corner round
With bramble-bush to keep concealed
Their doings: for the public road
Ran betwixt this their ground and that
The Farmer's, where he ploughed and sowed,
Grew corn for barn and grapes for vat.

VII.

"So, properly to guard his store
And gall the unbelievers too,
He builds a shrine and, what is more,
Procures a painter whom I knew,

One Buti (he 's with God) to paint
A holy picture there—no less
Than Virgin Mary free from taint
Borne to the sky by angels: yes!

VIII.

"Which shrine he fixed,—who says him nay?—
A-facing with its picture-side
Not, as you 'd think, the public way,
But just where sought these hounds to hide
Their carrion from that very truth
Of Mary's triumph: not a hound
Could act his mummeries uncouth
But Mary shamed the pack all round!

IX.

"Now, if it was amusing, judge!
—To see the company arrive,
Each Jew intent to end his trudge
And take his pleasure (though alive)
With all his Jewish kith and kin
Below ground, have his venom out,
Sharpen his wits for next day's sin,
Curse Christians, and so home, no doubt!

X.

"Whereas, each phyz upturned beholds
Mary, I warrant, soaring brave!
And in a trice, beneath the folds
Of filthy garb which gowns each knave,
Down drops it—there to hide grimace,
Contortion of the mouth and nose
At finding Mary in the place
They 'd keep for Pilate, I suppose!

XI.

"At last, they will not brook—not they!—
Longer such outrage on their tribe:
So, in some hole and corner, lay
Their heads together—how to bribe
The meritorious Farmer's self
To straight undo his work, restore
Their chance to meet and muse on pelf—
Pretending sorrow, as before!

XII.

"Forthwith, a posse, if you please,
Of Rabbi This and Rabbi That
Almost go down upon their knees
To get him lay the picture flat.

The spokesman, eighty years of age,
Grey as a badger, with a goat's
Not only beard but bleat, 'gins wage
War with our Mary. Thus he dotes:—

XIII.

"'*Friends, grant a grace! How Hebrews toil*
Through life in Florence—why relate
To those who lay the burden, spoil
Our paths of peace? We bear our fate.
But when with life the long toil ends,
Why must you—the expression craves
Pardon, but truth compels me, friends!—
Why must you plague us in our graves?

XIV.

"'*Thoughtlessly plague, I would believe!*
For how can you—the lords of ease
By nurture, birthright—e'en conceive
Our luxury to lie with trees
And turf,—the cricket and the bird
Left for our last companionship:
No harsh deed, no unkindly word,
No frowning brow nor scornful lip!

XV.

"'Death's luxury, we now rehearse
While, living, through your streets we fare
And take your hatred: nothing worse
Have we, once dead and safe, to bear!
So we refresh our souls, fulfil
Our works, our daily tasks; and thus
Gather you grain—earth's harvest—still
The wheat for you, the straw for us.

XVI.

"'What flouting in a face, what harm,
In just a lady borne from bier
By boys' heads, wings for leg and arm?'
You question. Friends, the harm is here—
That just when our last sigh is heaved,
And we would fain thank God and you
For labour done and peace achieved,
Back comes the Past in full review!

XVII.

"'At sight of just that simple flag,
Starts the foe-feeling serpent-like
From slumber. Leave it lulled, nor drag—
Though fangless—forth, what needs must strike

When stricken sore, though stroke be vain
Against the mailed oppressor! Give
Play to our fancy that we gain
Life's rights when once we cease to live!

XVIII.

"'*Thus much to courtesy, to kind,*
To conscience! Now to Florence folk!
There's core beneath this apple-rind,
Beneath this white-of-egg there's yolk!
Beneath this prayer to courtesy,
Kind, conscience—there's a sum to pouch!
How many ducats down will buy
Our shame's removal, sirs? Avouch!

XIX.

"'*Removal, not destruction, sirs!*
Just turn your picture! Let it front
The public path! Or memory errs,
Or that same public path is wont
To witness many a chance befall
Of lust, theft, bloodshed—sins enough,
Wherein our Hebrew part is small.
Convert yourselves!'—he cut up rough.

XX.

"Look you, how soon a service paid
Religion yields the servant fruit!
A prompt reply our Farmer made
So following: '*Sirs, to grant your suit*
Involves much danger! How? Transpose
Our Lady? Stop the chastisement,
All for your good, herself bestows?
What wonder if I grudge consent?

XXI.

"'—*Yet grant it: since, what cash I take*
Is so much saved from wicked use.
We know you! And, for Mary's sake,
A hundred ducats shall induce
Concession to your prayer. One day
Suffices: Master Buti's brush
Turns Mary round the other way,
And deluges your side with slush.

XXII.

"'*Down with the ducats therefore!*' Dump,
Dump, dump it falls, each counted piece,
Hard gold. Then out of door they stump,
These dogs, each brisk as with new lease

Of life, I warrant,—glad he 'll die
Henceforward just as he may choose,
Be buried and in clover lie!
Well said Esaias—'*stiff-necked Jews!*'

XXIII.

"Off posts without a minute's loss
Our Farmer, once the cash in poke
And summons Buti—ere its gloss
Have time to fade from off the joke—
To chop and change his work, undo
The done side, make the side, now blank,
Recipient of our Lady—who,
Displaced thus, had these dogs to thank!

XXIV.

"Now, boy, you 're hardly to instruct
In technicalities of Art!
My nephew's childhood sure has sucked
Along with mother's-milk some part
Of painter's-practice—learned, at least,
How expeditiously is plied
A work in fresco—never ceased
When once begun—a day, each side.

XXV.

"So, Buti—(he 's with God)—begins:
First covers up the shrine all round
With hoarding; then, as like as twins,
Paints, t' other side the burial-ground,
New Mary, every point the same;
Next, sluices over, as agreed,
The old; and last—but, spoil the game
By telling you? Not I, indeed!

XXVI.

"Well, ere the week was half at end,
Out came the object of this zeal,
This fine alacrity to spend
Hard money for mere dead men's weal!
How think you? That old spokesman Jew
Was High Priest, and he had a wife
As old, and she was dying too,
And wished to end in peace her life!

XXVII.

"And he must humour dying whims,
And soothe her with the idle hope
They 'd say their prayers and sing their hymns
As if her husband were the Pope!

And she did die—believing just
This privilege was purchased! Dead
In comfort through her foolish trust!
'*Stiff-necked ones*,' well Esaias said!

XXVIII.

"So, Sabbath morning, out of gate
And on to way, what sees our arch
Good Farmer? Why, they hoist their freight—
The corpse—on shoulder, and so, march!
'*Now for it, Buti!*' In the nick
Of time 't is pully-hauly, hence
With hoarding! O'er the wayside quick
There 's Mary plain in evidence!

XXIX.

"And here 's the convoy halting: right!
O they are bent on howling psalms
And growling prayers, when opposite!
And yet they glance, for all their qualms,
Approve that promptitude of his,
The Farmer's—duly at his post
To take due thanks from every phyz,
Sour smirk—nay, surly smile almost!

XXX.

"Then earthward drops each brow again;
The solemn task 's resumed; they reach
Their holy field—the unholy train:
Enter its precinct, all and each,
Wrapt somehow in their godless rites;
Till, rites at end, up-waking, lo
They lift their faces! What delights
The mourners as they turn to go?

XXXI.

"Ha, ha, he, he! On just the side
They drew their purse-strings to make quit
Of Mary,—Christ the Crucified
Fronted them now—these biters bit!
Never was such a hiss and snort,
Such screwing nose and shooting lip!
Their purchase—honey in report—
Proved gall and verjuice at first sip!

XXXII.

"Out they break, on they bustle, where,
A-top of wall, the Farmer waits
With Buti: never fun so rare!
The Farmer has the best: he rates

The rascal, as the old High Priest
Takes on himself to sermonize—
Nay, sneer '*We Jews supposed, at least,*
Theft was a crime in Christian eyes!

XXXIII.

"'*Theft?*' cries the Farmer. '*Eat your words!*
Show me what constitutes a breach
Of faith in aught was said or heard!
I promised you in plainest speech
I'd take the thing you count disgrace
And put it here—and here 't is put!
Did you suppose I 'd leave the place
Blank, therefore, just your rage to glut?

XXXIV.

"'*I guess you dared not stipulate*
For such a damned impertinence!
So, quick, my greybeard, out of gate
And in at Ghetto! Haste you hence!
As long as I have house and land,
To spite you irreligious chaps
Here shall the Crucifixion stand—
Unless you down with cash, perhaps!'

XXXV.

"So snickered he and Buti both.
The Jews said nothing, interchanged
A glance or two, renewed their oath
To keep ears stopped and hearts estranged
From grace, for all our Church can do;
Then off they scuttle: sullen jog
Homewards, against our Church to brew
Fresh mischief in their synagogue.

XXXVI.

"But next day—see what happened, boy!
See why I bid you have a care
How you pelt Jews! The knaves employ
Such methods of revenge, forbear
No outrage on our faith, when free
To wreak their malice! Here they took
So base a method—plague o' me
If I record it in my Book!

XXXVII.

"For, next day, while the Farmer sat
Laughing with Buti, in his shop,
At their successful joke,—rat-tat,—
Door opens, and they 're like to drop

Down to the floor as in there stalks
A six-feet-high herculean-built
Young he-Jew with a beard that baulks
Description. '*Help ere blood be spilt!*'

XXXVIII.

—"Screamed Buti: for he recognized
Whom but the son, no less no more,
Of that High Priest his work surprised
So pleasantly the day before!
Son of the mother, then, whereof
The bier he lent a shoulder to,
And made the moans about, dared scoff
At sober Christian grief—the Jew!

XXXIX.

"'*Sirs, I salute you! Never rise!*
No apprehension!' (Buti, white
And trembling like a tub of size,
Had tried to smuggle out of sight
The picture's self—the thing in oils,
You know, from which a fresco's dashed
Which courage speeds while caution spoils)
'*Stay and be praised, sir, unabashed!*

XL.

" '*Praised,—ay, and paid too: for I come*
To buy that very work of yours.
My poor abode, which boasts—well, some
Few specimens of Art, secures
Haply, a masterpiece indeed
If I should find my humble means
Suffice the outlay. So, proceed!
Propose—ere prudence intervenes!'

XLI.

" On Buti, cowering like a child,
These words descended from aloft,
In tone so ominously mild,
With smile terrifically soft
To that degree—could Buti dare
(Poor fellow) use his brains, think twice?
He asked, thus taken unaware,
No more than just the proper price!

XLII.

" '*Done!*' cries the monster. '*I disburse*
Forthwith your moderate demand.
Count on my custom—if no worse
Your future work be, understand,

Than this I carry off! No aid!
My arm, sir, lacks nor bone nor thews:
The burden's easy, and we're made,
Easy or hard, to bear—we Jews!'

XLIII.

"Crossing himself at such escape,
Buti by turns the money eyes
And, timidly, the stalwart shape
Now moving doorwards; but, more wise,
The Farmer,—who, though dumb, this while
Had watched advantage,—straight conceived
A reason for that tone and smile
So mild and soft! The Jew—believed!

XLIV.

"Mary in triumph borne to deck
A Hebrew household! Pictured where
No one was used to bend the neck
In praise or bow the knee in prayer!
Borne to that domicile by whom?
The son of the High Priest! Through what?
An insult done his mother's tomb!
Saul changed to Paul—the case came pat!

XLV.

" ' Stay, dog-Jew . . . gentle sir, that is!
Resolve me! Can it be, she crowned,—
Mary, by miracle,—Oh bliss!—
My present to your burial ground?
Certain, a ray of light has burst
Your veil of darkness! Had you else,
Only for Mary's sake, unpursed
So much hard money? Tell—oh, tell's!'

XLVI.

" Round—like a serpent that we took
For worm and trod on—turns his bulk
About the Jew. First dreadful look
Sends Buti in a trice to skulk
Out of sight somewhere, safe—alack!
But our good Farmer faith made bold:
And firm (with Florence at his back)
He stood, while gruff the gutturals rolled—

XLVII.

" ' Ay, sir, a miracle was worked,
By quite another power, I trow,
Than ever yet in canvas lurked,
Or you would scarcely face me now!

A certain impulse did suggest
A certain grasp with this right-hand,
Which probably had put to rest
Our quarrel,—thus your throat once spanned!

XLVIII.

" ' But I remembered me, subdued
That impulse, and you face me still!
And soon a philosophic mood
Succeeding (hear it, if you will!)
Has altogether changed my views
Concerning Art. Blind prejudice!
Well may you Christians tax us Jews
With scrupulosity too nice!

XLIX.

" ' For, don't I see,—let 's issue join!—
Whenever I 'm allowed pollute
(I—and my little bag of coin)
Some Christian palace of repute,—
Don't I see stuck up everywhere
Abundant proof that cultured taste
Has Beauty for its only care,
And upon Truth no thought to waste?

L.

" ' ' Jew, since it must be, take in pledge
Of payment '—*so a Cardinal*
Has sighed to me as if a wedge
Entered his heart—' this best of all
My treasures ! ' *Leda, Ganymede*
Or Antiope: swan, eagle, ape,
(*Or what 's the beast of what 's the breed*)
And Jupiter in every shape!

LI.

" ' *Whereat if I presume to ask*
' But, Eminence, though Titian's whisk
Of brush have well performed its task,
How comes it these false godships frisk
In presence of—what yonder frame
Pretends to image ? Surely, odd
It seems, you let confront The Name
Each beast the heathen called his god ! '

LII

" ' *Benignant smiles me pity straight*
The Cardinal. ' 'T is Truth, we prize !
Art 's the sole question in debate !
These subjects are so many lies.

We treat them with a proper scorn
When we turn lies—called gods forsooth—
To lies' fit use, now Christ is born.
Drawing and colouring are Truth.

LIII.

"'Think you I honour lies so much
As scruple to parade the charms
Of Leda—Titian, every touch—
Because the thing within her arms
Means Jupiter who had the praise
And prayer of a benighted world?
He would have mine too, if, in days
Of light, I kept the canvas furled!'

LIV.

"'*So ending, with some easy gibe.*
What power has logic! *I, at once,*
Acknowledged error in our tribe
So squeamish that, when friends ensconce
A pretty picture in its niche
To do us honour, deck our graves,
We fret and fume and have an itch
To strangle folk—ungrateful knaves!

LV.

"'No, sir! Be sure that—what 's its style,
Your picture?—shall possess ungrudged
A place among my rank and file
Of Ledas and what not—be judged
Just as a picture! and (because
I fear me much I scarce have bought
A Titian) Master Buti's flaws
Found there, will have the laugh flaws ought!'

LVI.

"So, with a scowl, it darkens door—
This bulk—no longer! Buti makes
Prompt glad re-entry; there 's a score
Of oaths, as the good Farmer wakes
From what must needs have been a trance,
Or he had struck (he swears) to ground
The bold bad mouth that dared advance
Such doctrine the reverse of sound!

LVII.

"Was magic here? Most like! For, since,
Somehow our city's faith grows still
More and more lukewarm, and our Prince
Or loses heart or wants the will

To check increase of cold. 'T is '*Live*
And let live! Languidly repress
The Dissident! In short,—contrive
Christians must bear with Jews: no less!'

LVIII.

"The end seems, any Israelite
Wants any picture,—pishes, poohs,
Purchases, hangs it full in sight
In any chamber he may choose!
In Christ's crown, one more thorn we rue!
In Mary's bosom, one more sword!
No, boy, you must not pelt a Jew!
O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord?"

EPILOGUE.

μεστοὶ . . .
οἱ δ' ἀμφορῆς οἴνου μέλανος ἀνθοσμίου.

I.

"The poets pour us wine—"
Said the dearest poet I ever knew,
Dearest and greatest and best to me.
You clamour athirst for poetry—
We pour. "But when shall a vintage be"—
You cry—"strong grape, squeezed gold from screw.
Yet sweet juice, flavoured flowery-fine?
That were indeed the wine!"

II.

One pours your cup—stark strength,
Meat for a man; and you eye the pulp
Strained, turbid still, from the viscous blood
Of the snaky bough: and you grumble "Good!

For it swells resolve, breeds hardihood;
Despatch it, then, in a single gulp!"
So, down, with a wry face, goes at length
The liquor: stuff for strength.

III.

One pours your cup—sheer sweet,
The fragrant fumes of a year condensed:
Suspicion of all that 's ripe or rathe,
From the bud on branch to the grass in swathe.
"We suck mere milk of the seasons," saith
A curl of each nostril—"dew, dispensed
Nowise for nerving man to feat:
Boys sip such honeyed sweet!"

IV.

And thus who wants wine strong,
Waves each sweet smell of the year away;
Who likes to swoon as the sweets suffuse
His brain with a mixture of beams and dews
Turned syrupy drink—rough strength eschews:
"What though in our veins your wine-stock stay?
The lack of the bloom does our palate wrong.
Give us wine sweet, not strong!"

V.

Yet wine is—some affirm—
Prime wine is found in the world somewhere,
Of potable strength with sweet to match.
You double your heart its dose, yet catch—
As the draught descends—a violet-smatch,
Softness—however it came there,
Through drops expressed by the fire and worm:
Strong sweet wine—some affirm.

VI.

Body and bouquet both?
'T is easy to ticket a bottle so;
But what was the case in the cask, my friends?
Cask? Nay, the vat—where the maker mends
His strong with his sweet (you suppose) and blends
His rough with his smooth, till none can know
How it comes you may tipple, nothing loth,
Body and bouquet both.

VII.

"You" being just—the world.
No poets—who turn, themselves, the winch
Of the press; no critics—I 'll even say,
(Being flustered and easy of faith to-day)

Who for love of the work have learned the way
Till themselves produce home-made, at a pinch:
No! You are the world, and wine ne'er purled
Except to please the world!

VIII.

"For, oh the common heart!
And, ah the irremissible sin
Of poets who please themselves, not us!
Strong wine yet sweet wine pouring thus,
How please still—Pindar and Æschylus!—
Drink—dipt into by the bearded chin
Alike and the bloomy lip—no part
Denied the common heart!

IX.

"And might we get such grace,
And did you moderns but stock our vault
With the true half-brandy half-attar-gul,
How would seniors indulge at a hearty pull
While juniors tossed off their thimbleful!
Our Shakespeare and Milton escaped your fault,
So, they reign supreme o'er the weaker race
That wants the ancient grace!"

X.

If I paid myself with words
(As the French say well) I were dupe indeed!
I were found in belief that you quaffed and bowsed
At your Shakespeare the whole day long, caroused
In your Milton pottle-deep nor drowsed
A moment of night—toped on, took heed
Of nothing like modern cream-and-curds.
Pay me with deeds, not words!

XI.

For—see your cellarage!
There are forty barrels with Shakespeare's brand.
Some five or six are abroach: the rest
Stand spigoted, fauceted. Try and test
What yourselves call best of the very best!
How comes it that still untouched they stand?
Why don't you try tap, advance a stage
With the rest in cellarage?

XII.

For—see your cellarage!
There are four big butts of Milton's brew.
How comes it you make old drips and drops
Do duty, and there devotion stops?

Leave such an abyss of malt and hops
Embellied in butts which bungs still glue?
You hate your bard! A fig for your rage!
Free him from cellarage!

XIII.

'T is said I brew stiff drink,
But the deuce a flavour of grape is there.
Hardly a May-go-down, 't is just
A sort of a gruff Go-down-it-must—
No Merry-go-down, no gracious gust
Commingles the racy with Springtide's rare!
"What wonder," say you "that we cough, and blink
At Autumn's heady drink?"

XIV.

Is it a fancy, friends?
Mighty and mellow are never mixed,
Though mighty and mellow be born at once.
Sweet for the future,—strong for the nonce!
Stuff you should stow away, ensconce
In the deep and dark, to be found fast-fixed
At the century's close: such time strength spends
A-sweetening for my friends!

XV

And then—why, what you quaff
With a smack of lip and a cluck of tongue,
Is leakage and leavings—just what haps
From the tun some learned taster taps
With a promise "Prepare your watery chaps!
Here 's properest wine for old and young!
Dispute its perfection—you make us laugh!
Have faith, give thanks, but—quaff!"

XVI.

Leakage, I say, or—worse—
Leavings suffice pot-valiant souls.
Somebody, brimful, long ago,
Frothed flagon he drained to the dregs; and lo,
Down whisker and beard what an overflow!
Lick spilth that has trickled from classic jowls,
Sup the single scene, sip the only verse—
Old wine, not new and worse!

XVII.

I grant you: worse by much!
Renounce that new where you never gained
One glow at heart, one gleam at head,
And stick to the warrant of age instead!

No dwarf's-lap! Fatten, by giants fed!
You fatten, with oceans of drink undrained?
You feed—who would choke did a cobweb smutch
The Age you love so much?

XVIII.

A mine 's beneath a moor:
Acres of moor roof fathoms of mine
Which diamonds dot where you please to dig;
Yet who plies spade for the bright and big?
Your product is—truffles, you hunt with a pig!
Since bright-and-big, when a man would dine,
Suits badly: and therefore the Koh-i-noor
May sleep in mine 'neath moor!

XIX.

Wine, pulse in might from me!
It may never emerge in must from vat,
Never fill cask nor furnish can,
Never end sweet, which strong began—
God's gift to gladden the heart of man;
But spirit 's at proof, I promise that!
No sparing of juice spoils what should be
Fit brewage—mine for me.

XX.

Man's thoughts and loves and hates!
Earth is my vineyard, these grew there:
From grape of the ground, I made or marred
My vintage; easy the task or hard,
Who set it—his praise be my reward!
Earth's yield! Who yearn for the Dark Blue Sea's,
Let them "lay, pray, bray"—the addle-pates!
Mine be Man's thoughts, loves, hates!

XXI.

But someone says "Good Sir!"
('T is a worthy versed in what concerns
The making such labour turn out well)
"You don't suppose that the nosegay-smell
Needs always come from the grape? Each bell
At your foot, each bud that your culture spurns,
The very cowslip would act like myrrh
On the stiffest brew—good Sir!

XXII.

"Cowslips, abundant birth
O'er meadow and hillside, vineyard too,
—Like a schoolboy's scrawlings in and out
Distasteful lesson-book—all about

Greece and Rome, victory and rout—
  Love-verses instead of such vain ado!
So, fancies frolic it o'er the earth
Where thoughts have rightlier birth.

XXIII.

"Nay, thoughtlings they themselves:
  Loves, hates—in little and less and least!
Thoughts? '*What is a man beside a mount!*'
Loves? '*Absent—poor lovers the minutes count!*
Hates? '*Fie—Pope's letters to Martha Blount!*
  These furnish a wine for a children's-feast:
Insipid to man, they suit the elves
Like thoughts, loves, hates themselves."

XXIV.

And, friends, beyond dispute
  I too have the cowslips dewy and dear.
Punctual as Springtide forth peep they:
I leave them to make my meadow gay.
But I ought to pluck and impound them, eh?
  Not let them alone, but deftly shear
And shred and reduce to—what may suit
Children, beyond dispute?

XXV.

And, here 's May-month, all bloom,
All bounty: what if I sacrifice?
If I out with shears and shear, nor stop
Shearing till prostrate, lo, the crop?
And will you prefer it to ginger-pop
When I 've made you wine of the memories
Which leave as bare as a churchyard tomb
My meadow, late all bloom?

XXVI.

Nay, what ingratitude
Should I hesitate to amuse the wits
That have pulled so long at my flask, nor grudged
The headache that paid their pains, nor budged
From bunghole before they sighed and judged
"Too rough for our taste, to-day, befits
The racy and right when the years conclude!"
Out on ingratitude!

XXVII.

Grateful or ingrate—none,
No cowslip of all my fairy crew
Shall help to concoct what makes you wink
And goes to your head till you think you think!

I like them alive: the printer's ink
Would sensibly tell on the perfume too.
I may use up my nettles, ere I 've done;
But of cowslips—friends get none!

XXVIII.

Don't nettles make a broth
Wholesome for blood grown lazy and thick?
Maws out of sorts make mouths out of taste.
My Thirty-four Port—no need to waste
On a tongue that 's fur and a palate—paste!
A magnum for friends who are sound! The sick—
I 'll posset and cosset them, nothing loth,
Henceforward with nettle-broth!

LA SAISIAZ.

I.

Good, to forgive;
Best, to forget!
Living, we fret;
Dying, we live.
Fretless and free,
Soul, clap thy pinion!
Earth have dominion,
Body, o'er thee!

II.

Wander at will,
Day after day,—
Wander away,
Wandering still—
Soul that canst soar!
Body may slumber:
Body shall cumber
Soul-flight no more.

III.

Waft of soul's wing!
What lies above?
Sunshine and Love,
Skyblue and Spring!
Body hides—where?
Ferns of all feather,
Mosses and heather,
Yours be the care!

LA SAISIAZ.

1878.

A. E. S. SEPTEMBER 14, 1877.

DARED and done: at last I stand upon the summit,
Dear and True!
Singly dared and done; the climbing both of us were
bound to do.
Petty feat and yet prodigious: every side my glance was
bent
O'er the grandeur and the beauty lavished through the
whole ascent.
Ledge by ledge, out broke new marvels, now minute and
now immense:
Earth's most exquisite disclosure, heaven's own God in
evidence!
And no berry in its hiding, no blue space in its out-
spread,

Pleaded to escape my footstep, challenged my emerging
head,
(As I climbed or paused from climbing, now o'erbranched
by shrub and tree,
Now built round by rock and boulder, now at just a turn
set free,
Stationed face to face with—Nature? rather with Infini-
tude)
—No revealment of them all, as singly I my path
pursued,
But a bitter touched its sweetness, for the thought stung
"Even so
Both of us had loved and wondered just the same,
five days ago!"
Five short days, sufficient hardly to entice, from out its
den
Splintered in the slab, this pink perfection of the
cyclamen;
Scarce enough to heal and coat with amber gum the
sloe-tree's gash,
Bronze the clustered wilding apple, redden ripe the
mountain-ash:
Yet of might to place between us—Oh the barrier! Yon
Profound
Shrinks beside it, proves a pin-point: barrier this, with-
out a bound!

Boundless though it be, I reach you: somehow seem to
have you here
—Who are there. Yes, there you dwell now, plain the
four low walls appear;
Those are vineyards they enclose from; and the little
spire which points
—That 's Collonge, henceforth your dwelling. All the
same, howe'er disjoints
Past from present, no less certain you are here, not
there: have dared,
Done the feat of mountain-climbing,—five days since, we
both prepared
Daring, doing, arm in arm, if other help should haply
fail.
For you asked, as forth we sallied to see sunset from the
vale,
"Why not try for once the mountain,—take a foretaste,
snatch by stealth
Sight and sound, some unconsidered fragment of the
hoarded wealth?
Six weeks at its base, yet never once have we together
won
Sight or sound by honest climbing: let us two have
dared and done
Just so much of twilight journey as may prove to-
morrow's jaunt

Not the only mode of wayfare—wheeled to reach the
eagle's haunt!"
So, we turned from the low grass-path you were pleased
to call "your own,"
Set our faces to the rose-bloom o'er the summit's front of
stone
Where Salève obtains, from Jura and the sunken sun she
hides,
Due return of blushing "Good Night," rosy as a borne-
off bride's,
For his masculine "Good Morrow" when, with sunrise
still in hold,
Gay he hails her, and, magnific, thrilled her black length
burns to gold.
Up and up we went, how careless—nay, how joyous!
All was new,
All was strange. "Call progress toilsome? that were just
insulting you!
How the trees must temper noontide! Ah, the thicket's
sudden break!
What will be the morning glory, when at dusk thus
gleams the lake?
Light by light puts forth Geneva: what a land—and, of
the land,
Can there be a lovelier station than this spot where now
we stand?

Is it late, and wrong to linger? True, to-morrow makes amends.
Toilsome progress? child's play, call it—specially when one descends!
There, the dread descent is over—hardly our adventure, though!
Take the vale where late we left it, pace the grass-path, 'mine,' you know!
Proud completion of achievement!" And we paced it, praising still
That soft tread on velvet verdure as it wound through hill and hill;
And at very end there met us, coming from Collonge, the pair
—All our people of the Chalet—two, enough and none to spare.
So, we made for home together, and we reached it as the stars
One by one came lamping—chiefly that prepotency of Mars—
And your last word was "I owe you this enjoyment!"—met with "Nay:
With yourself it rests to have a month of morrows like to-day!"
Then the meal, with talk and laughter, and the news of that rare nook

Yet untroubled by the tourist, touched on by no travel-book,
All the same—though latent—patent, hybrid birth of land and sea,
And (our travelled friend assured you)—if such miracle might be—
Comparable for completeness of both blessings—all around
Nature, and, inside her circle, safety from world's sight and sound—
Comparable to our Saisiaz. "Hold it fast and guard it well!
Go and see and vouch for certain, then come back and never tell
Living soul but us; and haply, prove our sky from cloud as clear,
There may we four meet, praise fortune just as now, another year!"

Thus you charged him on departure: not without the final charge
"Mind to-morrow's early meeting! We must leave our journey marge
Ample for the wayside wonders: there 's the stoppage at the inn
Three-parts up the mountain, where the hardships of the track begin;

There 's the convent worth a visit; but, the triumph crowning all—
There 's Salève's own platform facing glory which strikes greatness small,
—Blanc, supreme above his earth-brood, needles red and white and green,
Horns of silver, fangs of crystal set on edge in his demesne.
So, some three weeks since, we saw them: so, to-morrow we intend
You shall see them likewise; therefore Good Night till to-morrow, friend!"
Last, the nothings that extinguish embers of a vivid day:
"What might be the Marshal's next move, what Gambetta's counter-play?"
Till the landing on the staircase saw escape the latest spark:
"Sleep you well!" "Sleep but as well, you!"—lazy love quenched, all was dark.

Nothing dark next day at sundawn! Up I rose and forth I fared:
Took my plunge within the bath-pool, pacified the watch-dog scared,
Saw proceed the transmutation—Jura's black to one gold glow,

Trod your level path that let me drink the morning deep
and slow,
Reached the little quarry—ravage recompensed by shrub
and fern—
Till the overflowing ardours told me time was for return.
So, return I did, and gaily. But, for once, from no far
mound
Waved salute a tall white figure. "Has her sleep been
so profound?
Foresight, rather, prudent saving strength for day's ex-
penditure!
Ay, the chamber-window 's open : out and on the terrace,
sure!"

No, the terrace showed no figure, tall, white, leaning
through the wreaths,
Tangle-twine of leaf and bloom that intercept the air one
breathes,
Interpose between one's love and Nature's loving, hill
and dale
Down to where the blue lake's wrinkle marks the river's
inrush pale
—Mazy Arve : whereon no vessel but goes sliding white
and plain,
Not a steamboat pants from harbour but one hears
pulsate amain,

Past the city's congregated peace of homes and pomp of spires
—Man's mild protest that there 's something more than Nature, man requires,
And that, useful as is Nature to attract the tourist's foot,
Quiet slow sure money-making proves the matter's very root,—
Need for body,—while the spirit also needs a comfort reached
By no help of lake or mountain, but the texts whence Calvin preached.
" Here 's the veil withdrawn from landscape: up to Jura and beyond,
All awaits us ranged and ready; yet she violates the bond,
Neither leans nor looks nor listens: why is this?" A turn of eye
Took the whole sole answer, gave the undisputed reason " why ! "

This dread way you had your summons ! No premonitory touch,
As you talked and laughed ('t is told me) scarce a minute ere the clutch
Captured you in cold forever. Cold? nay, warm you were as life

When I raised you, while the others used, in passionate
poor strife,
All the means that seemed to promise any aid, and all in
vain.
Gone you were, and I shall never see that earnest face
again
Grow transparent, grow transfigured with the sudden light
that leapt,
At the first word's provocation, from the heart-deeps
where it slept.

Therefore, paying piteous duty, what seemed You have
we consigned
Peacefully to—what I think were, of all earth-beds, to
your mind
Most the choice for quiet, yonder: low walls stop the
vines' approach,
Lovingly Salève protects you; village-sports will ne'er
encroach
On the stranger lady's silence, whom friends bore so kind
and well
Thither "just for love's sake,"—such their own word was:
and who can tell?
You supposed that few or none had known and loved
you in the world:

May be! flower that 's full-blown tempts the butterfly,
not flower that 's furled.
But more learned sense unlocked you, loosed the sheath
and let expand
Bud to bell and outspread flower-shape at the least warm
touch of hand
—Maybe, throb of heart, beneath which,—quickening
farther than it knew,—
Treasure oft was disembosomed, scent all strange and
unguessed hue.
Disembosomed, re-embosomed,—must one memory suf-
fice,
Prove I knew an Alpine-rose which all beside named
Edelweiss?

Rare thing, red or white, you rest now: two days slum-
bered through; and since
One day more will see me rid of this same scene whereat
I wince,
Tetchy at all sights and sounds and pettish at each idle
charm
Proffered me who pace now singly where we two went
arm in arm,—
I have turned upon my weakness: asked "And what,
forsooth, prevents
That, this latest day allowed me, I fulfil of her intents

One she had the most at heart—that we should thus
again survey
From Salève Mont Blanc together? " Therefore,—dared
and done to-day
Climbing,—here I stand: but you—where?

If a spirit of the place
Broke the silence, bade me question, promised answer,—
what disgrace
Did I stipulate " Provided answer suit my hopes, not
fears! "
Would I shrink to learn my life-time's limit—days,
weeks, months or years?
Would I shirk assurance on each point whereat I can
but guess—
" Does the soul survive the body? Is there God's self,
no or yes? "
If I know my mood, 't were constant—come in whatsoe'er
uncouth
Shape it should, nay, formidable—so the answer were
but truth.

Well, and wherefore shall it daunt me, when 't is I myself
am tasked,
When, by weakness weakness questioned, weakly answers
—weakly asked?

Weakness never needs be falseness: truth is truth in each degree
—Thunderpealed by God to Nature, whispered by my soul to me.
Nay, the weakness turns to strength and triumphs in a truth beyond:
"Mine is but man's truest answer—how were it did God respond?"
I shall no more dare to mimic such response in futile speech,
Pass off human lisp as echo of the sphere-song out of reach,
Than,—because it well may happen yonder, where the far snows blanch
Mute Mont Blanc, that who stands near them sees and hears an avalanche,—
I shall pick a clod and throw,—cry "Such the sight and such the sound!
What though I nor see nor hear them? Others do, the proofs abound!"
Can I make my eye an eagle's, sharpen ear to recognize
Sound o'er league and league of silence? Can I know, who but surmise?
If I dared no self-deception when, a week since, I and you

Walked and talked along the grass-path, passing lightly in review
What seemed hits and what seemed misses in a certain fence-play,—strife
Sundry minds of mark engaged in "On the Soul and Future Life,"—
If I ventured estimating what was come of parried thrust,
Subtle stroke, and, rightly, wrongly, estimating could be just
—Just, though life so seemed abundant in the form which moved by mine,
I might well have played at feigning, fooling,—laughed "What need opine
Pleasure must succeed to pleasure, else past pleasure turns to pain,
And this first life claims a second, else I count its good no gain?"—
Much less have I heart to palter when the matter to decide
Now becomes "Was ending ending once and always, when you died?"
Did the face, the form I lifted as it lay, reveal the loss
Not alone of life but soul? A tribute to yon flowers and moss,

What of you remains beside? A memory! Easy to attest
"Certainly from out the world that one believes who knew her best
Such was good in her, such fair, which fair and good were great perchance
Had but fortune favoured, bidden each shy faculty advance;
After all—who knows another? Only as I know, I speak."
So much of you lives within me while I live my year or week.
Then my fellow takes the tale up, not unwilling to aver
Duly in his turn "I knew him best of all, as he knew her:
Such he was, and such he was not, and such other might have been
But that somehow every actor, somewhere in this earthly scene,
Fails." And so both memories dwindle, yours and mine together linked,
Till there is but left for comfort, when the last spark proves extinct,
This—that somewhere new existence led by men and women new

Possibly attains perfection coveted by me and you;
While ourselves, the only witness to what work our life evolved,
Only to ourselves proposing problems proper to be solved
By ourselves alone,—who working ne'er shall know if work bear fruit
Others reap and garner, heedless how produced by stalk and root,—
We who, darkling, timed the day's birth,—struggling, testified to peace,—
Earned, by dint of failure, triumph,—we, creative thought, must cease
In created word, thought's echo, due to impulse long since sped!
Why repine? There 's ever someone lives although our selves be dead!

Well, what signifies repugnance? Truth is truth howe'er it strike.
Fair or foul the lot apportioned life on earth, we bear alike.
Stalwart body idly yoked to stunted spirit, powers, that fain
Else would soar, condemned to grovel, groundlings through the fleshly chain,—

Help that hinders, hindrance proved but help disguised
when all too late,—
Hindrance is the fact acknowledged, howsoe'er explained
as Fate,
Fortune, Providence: we bear, own life a burthen more
or less.
Life thus owned unhappy, is there supplemental happi-
ness
Possible and probable in life to come? or must we
count
Life a curse and not a blessing, summed-up in its whole
amount,
Help and hindrance, joy and sorrow?
Why should I want courage here?
I will ask and have an answer,—with no favour, with no
fear,—
From myself. How much, how little, do I inwardly
believe
True that controverted doctrine? Is it fact to which I
cleave,
Is it fancy I but cherish, when I take upon my
lips
Phrase the solemn Tuscan fashioned, and declare the
soul's eclipse
Not the soul's extinction? take his "I believe and I
declare—

Certain am I—from this life I pass into a better, there
Where that lady lives of whom enamoured was my soul" —where this
Other lady, my companion dear and true, she also is?

I have questioned and am answered. Question, answer presuppose
Two points: that the thing itself which questions, answers,—*is*, it knows;
As it also knows the thing perceived outside itself,—force
Actual ere its own beginning, operative through its course,
Unaffected by its end,—that this thing likewise needs must be;
Call this—God, then, call that—soul, and both—the only facts for me.
Prove them facts? that they o'erpass my power of proving, proves them such:
Fact it is I know I know not something which is fact as much.
What before caused all the causes, what effect of all effects
Haply follows,—these are fancy. Ask the rush if it suspects

Whence and how the stream which floats it had a rise,
and where and how
Falls or flows on still! What answer makes the rush
except that now
Certainly it floats and is, and, no less certain than
itself,
Is the everyway external stream that now through shoal
and shelf
Floats it onward, leaves it—may be—wrecked at last, or
lands on shore
There to root again and grow and flourish stable
evermore.
—May be! mere surmise not knowledge: much con-
jecture styled belief,
What the rush conceives the stream means through the
voyage blind and brief.
Why, because I doubtless am, shall I as doubtless be?
"Because
God seems good and wise." Yet under this our life's
apparent laws
Reigns a wrong which, righted once, would give quite
other laws to life.
"He seems potent." Potent here, then: why are right
and wrong at strife?
Has in life the wrong the better? Happily life ends so
soon!

Right predominates in life? Then why two lives and
double boon?
"Anyhow, we want it: wherefore want?" Because,
without the want,
Life, now human, would be brutish: just that hope, how-
ever scant,
Makes the actual life worth leading; take the hope
therein away,
All we have to do is surely not endure another
day.
This life has its hopes for this life, hopes that promise
joy: life done—
Out of all the hopes, how many had complete fulfilment?
none.
"But the soul is not the body:" and the breath is not
the flute;
Both together make the music: either marred and all is
mute.
Truce to such old sad contention whence, according as
we shape
Most of hope or most of fear, we issue in a half-
escape:
"We believe" is sighed. I take the cup of comfort
proffered thus,
Taste and try each soft ingredient, sweet infusion, and
discuss

What their blending may accomplish for the cure of
doubt, till—slow,
Sorrowful, but how decided! needs must I o'erturn it—so!
Cause before, effect behind me—blanks! The midway
point I am,
Caused, itself—itself efficient: in that narrow space
must cram
All experience—out of which there crowds conjecture
manifold,
But, as knowledge, this comes only—things may be as I
behold,
Or may not be, but, without me and above me, things
there are;
I myself am what I know not—ignorance which proves
no bar
To the knowledge that I am, and, since I am, can
recognize
What to me is pain and pleasure: this is sure, the rest—
surmise.
If my fellows are or are not, what may please them and
what pain,—
Mere surmise: my own experience—that is knowledge,
once again!

I have lived, then, done and suffered, loved and hated,
learnt and taught

This—there is no reconciling wisdom with a world distraught,
Goodness with triumphant evil, power with failure in the aim,
If—(to my own sense, remember! though none other feel the same!)—
If you bar me from assuming earth to be a pupil's place,
And life, time,—with all their chances, changes,—just probation-space,
Mine, for me. But those apparent other mortals—theirs, for them?
Knowledge stands on my experience: all outside its narrow hem,
Free surmise may sport and welcome! Pleasures, pains affect mankind
Just as they affect myself? Why, here 's my neighbour colour-blind,
Eyes like mine to all appearance: "green as grass" do I affirm?
"Red as grass" he contradicts me: which employs the proper term?
Were we two the earth's sole tenants, with no third for referee,
How should I distinguish? Just so, God must judge 'twixt man and me.

To each mortal peradventure earth becomes a new machine,
Pain and pleasure no more tally in our sense than red and green;
Still, without what seems such mortal's pleasure, pain, my life were lost
—Life, my whole sole chance to prove—although at man's apparent cost—
What is beauteous and what ugly, right to strive for, right to shun,
Fit to help and fit to hinder,—prove my forces everyone,
Good and evil,—learn life's lesson, hate of evil, love of good,
As 't is set me, understand so much as may be understood—
Solve the problem: "From thine apprehended scheme of things, deduce
Praise or blame of its contriver, shown a niggard or profuse
In each good or evil issue! nor miscalculate alike
Counting one the other in the final balance, which to strike,
Soul was born and life allotted: ay, the show of things unfurled
For thy summing-up and judgment,—thine, no other mortal's world!"

What though fancy scarce may grapple with the complex and immense
—"His own world for every mortal?" Postulate omnipotence!
Limit power, and simple grows the complex: shrunk to atom size,
That which loomed immense to fancy low before my reason lies,—
I survey it and pronounce it work like other work: success
Here and there, the workman's glory,—here and there, his shame no less,
Failure as conspicuous. Taunt not "Human work ape work divine?"
As the power, expect performance! God's be God's as mine is mine!
God whose power made man and made man's wants, and made, to meet those wants,
Heaven and earth which, through the body, prove the spirit's ministrants,
Excellently all,—did He lack power or was the will in fault
When He let blue heaven be shrouded o'er by vapours of the vault,
Gay earth drop her garlands shrivelled at the first infecting breath

Of the serpent pains which herald, swarming in, the dragon death?
What, no way but this that man may learn and lay to heart how rife
Life were with delights would only death allow their taste to life?
Must the rose sigh "Pluck—I perish!" must the eve weep "Gaze—I fade!"
—Every sweet warn "'Ware my bitter!" every shine bid "Wait my shade"?
Can we love but on condition, that the thing we love must die?
Needs there groan a world in anguish just to teach us sympathy—
Multitudinously wretched that we, wretched too, may guess
What a preferable state were universal happiness?
Hardly do I so conceive the outcome of that power which went
To the making of the worm there in yon clod its tenement,
Any more than I distinguish aught of that which, wise and good,
Framed the leaf, its plain of pasture, dropped the dew, its fineless food.
Nay, were fancy fact, were earth and all it holds illusion mere,

Only a machine for teaching love and hate and hope and fear
To myself, the sole existence, single truth mid falsehood, —well!
If the harsh throes of the prelude die not off into the swell
Of that perfect piece they sting me to become a-strain for,—if
Roughness of the long rock-clamber lead not to the last of cliff,
First of level country where is sward my pilgrim-foot can prize,—
Plainlier! if this life's conception new life fail to realize,—
Though earth burst and proved a bubble glassing hues of hell, one huge
Reflex of the devil's doings—God's work by no subterfuge—
(So death's kindly touch informed me as it broke the glamour, gave
Soul and body both release from life's long nightmare in the grave)
Still,—with no more Nature, no more Man as riddle to be read,
Only my own joys and sorrows now to reckon real instead,—

I must say— or choke in silence—" Howsoever came my fate,
Sorrow did and joy did nowise,—life well weighed,—preponderate."
By necessity ordained thus? I shall bear as best I can;
By a cause all-good, all-wise, all-potent? No, as I am man!
Such were God: and was it goodness that the good within my range
Or had evil in admixture or grew evil's self by change?
Wisdom—that becoming wise meant making slow and sure advance
From a knowledge proved in error to acknowledged ignorance?
Power? 't is just the main assumption reason most revolts at! power
Unavailing for bestowment on its creature of an hour,
Man, of so much proper action rightly aimed and reaching aim,
So much passion,—no defect there, no excess, but still the same,—
As what constitutes existence, pure perfection bright as brief
For yon worm, man's fellow-creature, on yon happier world—its leaf!
No, as I am man, I mourn the poverty I must impute:

Goodness, wisdom, power, all bounded, each a human attribute!

But, O world outspread beneath me! only for myself I speak,
Nowise dare to play the spokesman for my brothers strong and weak,
Full and empty, wise and foolish, good and bad, in every age,
Every clime, I turn my eyes from, as in one or other stage
Of a torture writhe they, Job-like couched on dung and crazed with blains
—Wherefore? whereto? ask the whirlwind what the dread voice thence explains!
I shall "vindicate no way of God's to man," nor stand apart,
"Laugh, be candid!" while I watch it traversing the human heart.
Traversed heart must tell its story uncommented on: no less
Mine results in "Only grant a second life, I acquiesce
In this present life as failure, count misfortune's worst assaults
Triumph, not defeat, assured that loss so much the more exalts

Gain about to be. For at what moment did I so advance
Near to knowledge as when frustrate of escape from ignorance?
Did not beauty prove most precious when its opposite obtained
Rule, and truth seem more than ever potent because falsehood reigned?
While for love—Oh how but, losing love, does whoso loves succeed
By the death-pang to the birth-throe—learning what is love indeed?
Only grant my soul may carry high through death her cup unspilled,
Brimming though it be with knowledge, life's loss drop by drop distilled,
I shall boast it mine—the balsam, bless each kindly wrench that wrung
From life's tree its inmost virtue, tapped the root whence pleasure sprung,
Barked the bole, and broke the bough, and bruised the berry, left all grace
Ashes in death's stern alembic, loosed elixir in its place!

Witness, Dear and True, how little I was 'ware of—not your worth

—That I knew, my heart assures me—but of what a
shade on earth
Would the passage from my presence of the tall white
figure throw
O'er the ways we walked together! Somewhat narrow,
somewhat slow
Used to seem the ways, the walking: narrow ways are
well to tread
When there 's moss beneath the footstep, honeysuckle
overhead:
Walking slow to beating bosom surest solace soonest
gives,
Liberates the brain o'erloaded—best of all restora-
tives.
Nay, do I forget the open vast where soon or late con-
verged
Ways though winding?—world-wide heaven-high sea
where music slept or surged
As the angel had ascendant, and Beethoven's Titan
mace
Smote the immense to storm Mozart would by a finger's
lifting chase?
Yes, I knew—but not with knowledge such as thrills me
while I view
Yonder precinct which henceforward holds and hides the
Dear and True.

Grant me (once again) assurance we shall each meet
each some day,
Walk—but with how bold a footstep! on a way—but
what a way!
—Worst were best, defeat were triumph, utter loss were
utmost gain.
Can it be, and must, and will it?

Silence! Out of fact's domain,
Just surmise prepared to mutter hope, and also fear—
dispute
Fact's inexorable ruling "Outside fact, surmise be mute!"
Well!
Ay, well and best, if fact's self I may force the
answer from!
'T is surmise I stop the mouth of. Not above in yonder
dome
All a rapture with its rose-glow,—not around, where pile
and peak
Strainingly await the sun's fall,—not beneath, where
crickets creak,
Birds assemble for their bed-time, soft the tree-top swell
subsides,—
No, nor yet within my deepest sentient self the know-
ledge hides.
Aspiration, reminiscence, plausibilities of trust

– Now the ready "Man were wronged else," now the rash
"and God unjust"—
None of these I need. Take thou, my soul, thy solitary
stand,
Umpire to the champions Fancy, Reason, as on either
hand
Amicable war they wage and play the foe in thy
behoof!
Fancy thrust and Reason parry! Thine the prize who
stand aloof.

FANCY.

I concede the thing refused: henceforth no certainty
more plain
Than this mere surmise that after body dies soul lives
again.
Two, the only facts acknowledged late, are now increased
to three—
God is, and the soul is, and, as certain, after death
shall be.
Put this third to use in life, the time for using fact!

REASON.

I do:
Find it promises advantage, coupled with the other two.

Life to come will be improvement on the life that 's now ; destroy
Body's thwartings, there 's no longer screen betwixt soul and soul's joy.
Why should we expect new hindrance, novel tether? In this first
Life, I see the good of evil, why our world began at worst :
Since time means amelioration, tardily enough displayed,
Yet a mainly onward moving, never wholly retrograde.
We know more though we know little, we grow stronger though still weak,
Partly see though all too purblind, stammer though we cannot speak.
There is no such grudge in God as scared the ancient Greek, no fresh
Substitute of trap for dragnet, once a breakage in the mesh.
Dragons were, and serpents are, and blindworms will be : ne'er emerged
Any new-created python for man's plague since earth was purged.
Failing proof, then, of invented trouble to replace the old,

O'er this life the next presents advantage much and manifold:
Which advantage—in the absence of a fourth and farther fact
Now conceivably surmised, of harm to follow from the act—
I pronounce for man's obtaining at this moment. Why delay?
Is he happy? happiness will change: anticipate the day!
Is he sad? there's ready refuge: of all sadness death's prompt cure!
Is he both, in mingled measure? cease a burthen to endure!
Pains with sorry compensations, pleasures stinted in the dole,
Power that sinks and pettiness that soars, all halved and nothing whole,
Idle hopes that lure man onward, forced back by as idle fears—
What a load he stumbles under through his glad sad seventy years,
When a touch sets right the turmoil, lifts his spirit where, flesh-freed,
Knowledge shall be rightly named so, all that seems be truth indeed!

Grant his forces no accession, nay, no faculty's increase,
Only let what now exists continue, let him prove in peace
Power whereof the interrupted unperfected play enticed
Man through darkness, which to lighten any spark of hope sufficed,—
What shall then deter his dying out of darkness into light?
Death itself perchance, brief pain that 's pang, condensed and infinite?
But at worst, he needs must brave it one day, while, at best, he laughs—
Drops a drop within his chalice, sleep not death his science quaffs!
Any moment claims more courage when, by crossing cold and gloom,
Manfully man quits discomfort, makes for the provided room
Where the old friends want their fellow, where the new acquaintance wait,
Probably for talk assembled, possibly to sup in state!
I affirm and re-affirm it therefore: only make as plain
As that man now lives, that, after dying, man will live again,—
Make as plain the absence, also, of a law to contravene

Voluntary passage from this life to that by change of scene,—
And I bid him—at suspicion of first cloud athwart his sky,
Flower's departure, frost's arrival—never hesitate, but die!

FANCY.

Then I double my concession: grant, along with new life sure,
This same law found lacking now: ordain that, whether rich or poor
Present life is judged in aught man counts advantage—be it hope,
Be it fear that brightens, blackens most or least his horoscope,—
He, by absolute compulsion such as made him live at all,
Go on living to the fated end of life whate'er befall.
What though, as on earth he darkling grovels, man descry the sphere,
Next life's—call it, heaven of freedom, close above and crystal-clear?
He shall find—say, hell to punish who in aught curtails the term,
Fain would act the butterfly before he has played out the worm.

God, soul, earth, heaven, hell,—five facts now: what is to desiderate?

REASON.

Nothing! Henceforth man's existence bows to the monition "Wait!

Take the joys and bear the sorrows—neither with extreme concern!

Living here means nescience simply: 't is next life that helps to learn.

Shut those eyes, next life will open,—stop those ears, next life will teach

Hearing's office,—close those lips, next life will give the power of speech!

Or, if action more amuse thee than the passive attitude,

Bravely bustle through thy being, busy thee for ill or good,

Reap this life's success or failure! Soon shall things be unperplexed

And the right and wrong, now tangled, lie unravelled in the next."

FANCY.

Not so fast! Still more concession! not alone do I declare

Life must needs be borne,—I also will that man become aware
Life has worth incalculable. every moment that he spends
So much gain or loss for that next life which on this life depends.
Good, done here, be there rewarded,—evil, worked here, there amerced!
Six facts now, and all established, plain to man the last as first.

REASON.

There was good and evil, then, defined to man by this decree?
Was—for at its promulgation both alike have ceased to be.
Prior to this last announcement "Certainly as God exists,
As He made man's soul, as soul is quenchless by the deathly mists,
Yet is, all the same, forbidden premature escape from time
To eternity's provided purer air and brighter clime,—
Just so certainly depends it on the use to which man turns

Earth, the good or evil done there, whether after death he earns
Life eternal, —heaven, the phrase be, or eternal death, — say, hell.
As his deeds, so proves his portion, doing ill or doing well "
—Prior to this last announcement, earth was man's probation-place:
Liberty of doing evil gave his doing good a grace;
Once lay down the law, with Nature's simple "Such effects succeed
Causes such, and heaven or hell depends upon man's earthly deed
Just as surely as depends the straight or else the crooked line
On his making point meet point or with or else without incline,"—
Thenceforth neither good nor evil does man, doing what he must.
Lay but down that law as stringent "Wouldst thou live again, be just!"
As this other "Wouldst thou live now, regularly draw thy breath!
For, suspend the operation, straight law's breach results in death—"
And (provided always, man, addressed this mode, be sound and sane)

Prompt and absolute obedience, never doubt, will law obtain!
Tell not me "Look round us! nothing each side but acknowledged law,
Now styled God's—now, Nature's edict!" Where 's obedience without flaw
Paid to either? What 's the adage rife in man's mouth? Why, "The best
I both see and praise, the worst I follow"—which, despite professed
Seeing, praising, all the same he follows, since he disbelieves
In the heart of him that edict which for truth his head receives.
There 's evading and persuading and much making law amends
Somehow, there 's the nice distinction 'twixt fast foes and faulty friends,
—Any consequence except inevitable death when "Die,
Whoso breaks our law!" they publish, God and Nature equally.
Law that 's kept or broken—subject to man's will and pleasure! Whence?
How comes law to bear eluding? Not because of impotence:
Certain laws exist already which to hear means to obey;

Therefore not without a purpose these man must, while those man may
Keep and, for the keeping, haply gain approval and reward.
Break through this last superstructure, all is empty air—no sward
Firm like my first fact to stand on "God there is, and soul there is,"
And soul's earthly life-allotment: wherein, by hypothesis,
Soul is bound to pass probation, prove its powers, and exercise
Sense and thought on fact, and then, from fact educing fit surmise,
Ask itself, and of itself have solely answer, "Does the scope
Earth affords of fact to judge by warrant future fear or hope?"

Thus have we come back full circle: fancy's footsteps one by one
Go their round conducting reason to the point where they begun,
Left where we were left so lately, Dear and True! When, half a week
Since, we walked and talked and thus I told you, how suffused a cheek

You had turned me had I sudden brought the blush into
the smile
By some word like "Idly argued! you know better all
the while!"
Now, from me—Oh not a blush but, how much more,
a joyous glow,
Laugh triumphant, would it strike did your "Yes, better
I do know"
Break, my warrant for assurance! which assurance may
not be
If, supplanting hope, assurance needs must change this
life to me.
So, I hope—no more than hope, but hope—no less than
hope, because
I can fathom, by no plumb-line sunk in life's apparent
laws,
How I may in any instance fix where change should
meetly fall
Nor involve, by one revisal, abrogation of them
all:
—Which again involves as utter change in life thus law-
released,
Whence the good of goodness vanished when the ill of
evil ceased.
Whereas, life and laws apparent re-instated,—all we
know,

All we know not,—o'er our heaven again cloud closes, until, lo—
Hope the arrowy, just as constant, comes to pierce its gloom, compelled
By a power and by a purpose which, if no one else beheld,
I behold in life, so—hope!

Sad summing-up of all to say!
Athanasius contra mundum, why should he hope more than they?
So are men made notwithstanding, such magnetic virtue darts
From each head their fancy haloes to their unresisting hearts!

Here I stand, methinks a stone's throw from yon village I this morn
Traversed for the sake of looking one last look at its forlorn
Tenement's ignoble fortune: through a crevice, plain its floor
Piled with provender for cattle, while a dung-heap blocked the door.
In that squalid Bossex, under that obscene red roof, arose,

Like a fiery flying serpent from its egg, a soul—
Rousseau's.
Turn thence! Is it Diodati joins the glimmer of the
lake?
There I plucked a leaf, one week since,—ivy, plucked
for Byron's sake.
Famed unfortunates! And yet, because of that phos-
phoric fame
Swathing blackness' self with brightness till putridity
looked flame,
All the world was witched: and wherefore? what could
lie beneath, allure
Heart of man to let corruption serve man's head as cyno-
sure?
Was the magic in the dictum "All that 's good is gone
and past;
Bad and worse still grows the present, and the worst of
all comes last:
Which believe—for I believe it?" So preached one his
gospel-news;
While melodious moaned the other "Dying day with
dolphin-hues!
Storm, for loveliness and darkness like a woman's eye!
Ye mounts
Where I climb to 'scape my fellow, and thou sea wherein
he counts

Not one inch of vile dominion! What were your especial worth
Failed ye to enforce the maxim 'Of all objects found on earth
Man is meanest, much too nonoured when compared with—what by odds
Beats him—any dog: so, let him go a-howling to his gods!'
Which believe—for I believe it!" such the comfort man received
Sadly since perforce he must: for why? the famous bard believed!

Fame! Then, give me fame, a moment! As I gather at a glance
Human glory after glory vivifying yon expanse,
Let me grasp them all together, hold on high and brandish well
Beacon-like above the rapt world ready, whether heaven or hell
Send the dazzling summons earthward, to submit itself the same,
Take on trust the hope or else despair flashed full on face by—Fame!
Thanks, thou pine-tree of Makistos, wide thy giant torch I wave!

Know ye whence I plucked the pillar, late with sky for
architrave?
This the trunk, the central solid Knowledge, kindled core,
began
Tugging earth-deeps, trying heaven-heights, rooted yonder
at Lausanne.
This which flits and spits, the aspic,—sparkles in and out
the boughs
Now, and now condensed, the python, coiling round and
round allows
Scarce the bole its due effulgence, dulled by flake on
flake of Wit—
Laughter so bejewels Learning,—what but Ferney
nourished it?
Nay, nor fear—since every resin feeds the flame—that I
dispense
With yon Bossex terebinth-tree's all-explosive Elo-
quence:
No, be sure! nor, any more than thy resplendency, Jean-
Jacques,
Dare I want thine, Diodati! What though monkeys and
macaques
Gibber "Byron"? Byron's ivy rears a branch beyond
the crew,
Green for ever, no deciduous trash macaques and mon-
keys chew!

As Rousseau, then, eloquent, as Byron prime in poet's power,—
Detonations, fulgurations, smiles—the rainbow, tears—the shower,—
Lo, I lift the coruscating marvel—Fame! and, famed, declare
—Learned for the nonce as Gibbon, witty as wit's self Voltaire . . .
O the sorriest of conclusions to whatever man of sense
Mid the millions stands the unit, takes no flare for evidence!
Yet the millions have their portion, live their calm or troublous day,
Find significance in fireworks: so, by help of mine, they may
Confidently lay to heart and lock in head their life long —this:
"He there with the brand flamboyant, broad o'er night's forlorn abyss,
Crowned by prose and verse; and wielding, with Wit's bauble, Learning's rod . . .
Well? Why, he at least believed in Soul, was very sure of God.

So the poor smile played, that evening: pallid smile long since extinct
Here in London's mid-November! Not so loosely thoughts were linked,
Six weeks since as I, descending in the sunset from Salève,
Found the chain, I seemed to forge there, flawless till it reached your grave,—
Not so filmy was the texture, but I bore it in my breast
Safe thus far. And since I found a something in me would not rest
Till I, link by link, unravelled any tangle of the chain,
—Here it lies, for much or little! I have lived all o'er again
That last pregnant hour: I saved it, just as I could save a root
Disinterred for re-interment when the time best helps to shoot.
Life is stocked with germs of torpid life; but may I never wake
Those of mine whose resurrection could not be without earthquake!
Rest all such, unraised forever! Be this, sad yet sweet, the sole
Memory evoked from slumber! Least part this: then what the whole?

THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

I.

Such a starved bank of moss
Till that May-morn,
Blue ran the flash across:
Violets were born!

II.

Sky – what a scowl of cloud
Till, near and far,
Ray on ray split the shroud
Splendid, a star!

III.

World—how it walled about
Life with disgrace
Till God's own smile came out:
That was thy face!

THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

1878.

I.

"Fame!" Yes, I said it and you read it. First,
Praise the good log-fire! Winter howls without.
Crowd closer, let us! Ha, the secret nursed
Inside yon hollow, crusted roundabout
With copper where the clamp was,—how the burst
Vindicates flame the stealthy feeder! Spout
Thy splendidest—a minute and no more?
So soon again all sobered as before?

II.

Nay, for I need to see your face! One stroke
Adroitly dealt, and lo, the pomp revealed!
Fire in his pandemonium, heart of oak
Palatial, where he wrought the works concealed

Beneath the solid-seeming roof I broke,
As redly up and out and off they reeled
Like disconcerted imps, those thousand sparks
From fire's slow tunnelling of vaults and arcs!

III.

Up, out, and off, see! Were you never used,—
You now, in childish days or rather nights,—
As I was, to watch sparks fly? not amused
By that old nurse-taught game which gave the sprites
Each one his title and career,—confused
Belief 't was all long over with the flights
From earth to heaven of hero, sage and bard,
And bade them once more strive for Fame's award?

IV.

New long bright life! and happy chance befell—
That I know—when some prematurely lost
Child of disaster bore away the bell
From some too-pampered son of fortune, crossed
Never before my chimney broke the spell!
Octogenarian Keats gave up the ghost,
While—never mind Who was it cumbered earth—
Sank stifled, span-long brightness, in the birth.

V.

Well, try a variation of the game!
Our log is old ship-timber, broken bulk.
There's sea-brine spirits up the brimstone flame,
That crimson-curly spiral proves the hulk
Was saturate with—ask the chloride's name
From somebody who knows! I shall not sulk
If yonder greenish tonguelet licked from brass
Its life, I thought was fed on copperas.

VI.

Anyhow, there they flutter! What may be
The style and prowess of that purple one?
Who is the hero other eyes shall see
Than yours and mine? That yellow, deep to dun—
Conjecture how the sage glows, whom not we
But those unborn are to get warmth by! Son
O' the coal,—as Job and Hebrew name a spark,—
What bard, in thy red soaring, scares the dark?

VII.

Oh and the lesser lights, the dearer still
That they elude a vulgar eye, give ours
The glimpse repaying astronomic skill
Which searched sky deeper, passed those patent powers

Constellate proudly,—swords, scrolls, harps, that fill
The vulgar eye to surfeit,—found best flowers
Hid deepest in the dark,—named unplucked grace
Of soul, ungathered beauty, form or face!

VIII.

Up with thee, mouldering ash men never knew,
But I know! flash thou forth, and figure bold,
Calm and columnar as yon flame I view!
Oh and I bid thee,—to whom fortune doled
Scantly all other gifts out—bicker blue,
Beauty for all to see, zinc's uncontrolled
Flake-brilliance! Not my fault if these were shown,
Grandeur and beauty both, to me alone.

IX.

No! as the first was boy's play, this proves mere
Stripling's amusement: manhood's sport be grave!
Choose rather sparkles quenched in mid career,
Their boldness and their brightness could not save
(In some old night of time on some lone drear
Sea-coast, monopolized by crag or cave)
—Save from ignoble exit into smoke,
Silence, oblivion, all death-damps that choke!

X.

Launched by our ship-wood, float we, once adrift
In fancy to that land-strip waters wash,
We both know well! Where uncouth tribes made shift
Long since to just keep life in, billows dash
Nigh over folk who shudder at each lift
Of the old tyrant tempest's whirlwind-lash
Though they have built the serviceable town
Tempests but tease now, billows drench, not drown.

XI.

Croisic, the spit of sandy rock which juts
Spitefully northward, bears nor tree nor shrub
To tempt the ocean, show what Guérande shuts
Behind her, past wild Batz whose Saxons grub
The ground for crystals grown where ocean gluts
Their promontory's breadth with salt: all stub
Of rock and stretch of sand, the land's last strife
To rescue a poor remnant for dear life.

XII.

And what life! Here was, from the world to choose,
The Druids' chosen chief of homes: they reared
—Only their women,—mid the slush and ooze
Of yon low islet,—to their sun, revered

In strange stone guise,—a temple. May-dawn dews
Saw the old structure levelled; when there peered
May's earliest eve-star, high and wide once more
Up towered the new pile perfect as before:

XIII.

Seeing that priestesses—and all were such—
Unbuilt and then rebuilt it every May,
Each alike helping—well, if not too much!
For, mid their eagerness to outstrip day
And get work done, if any loosed her clutch
And let a single stone drop, straight a prey
Herself fell, torn to pieces, limb from limb,
By sisters in full chorus glad and grim.

XIV.

And still so much remains of that grey cult,
That even now, of nights, do women steal
To the sole Menhir standing, and insult
The antagonistic church-spire by appeal
To power discrowned in vain, since each adult
Believes the gruesome thing she clasps may heal
Whatever plague no priestly help can cure:
Kiss but the cold stone, the event is sure!

XV.

Nay more: on May-morns, that primeval rite
Of temple-building, with its punishment
For rash precipitation, lingers, spite
Of all remonstrance; vainly are they shent,
Those girls who form a ring and, dressed in white,
Dance round it, till some sister's strength be spent:
Touch but the Menhir, straight the rest turn roughs
From gentles, fall on her with fisticuffs.

XVI.

Oh and, for their part, boys from door to door
Sing unintelligible words to tunes
As obsolete: "scraps of Druidic lore,"
Sigh scholars, as each pale man importunes
Vainly the mumbling to speak plain once more.
Enough of this old worship, rounds and runes!
They serve my purpose, which is but to show
Croisic to-day and Croisic long ago.

XVII.

What have we sailed to see, then, wafted there
By fancy from the log that ends its days
Of much adventure 'neath skies foul or fair,
On waters rough or smooth, in this good blaze

We two crouch round so closely, bidding care
Keep outside with the snow-storm? Something says
"Fit time for story-telling!" I begin—
Why not at Croisic, port we first put in?

XVIII.

Anywhere serves: for point me out the place
Wherever man has made himself a home,
And there I find the story of our race
In little, just at Croisic as at Rome.
What matters the degree? the kind I trace.
Druids their temple, Christians have their dome:
So with mankind; and Croisic, I 'll engage,
With Rome yields sort for sort, in age for age.

XIX.

No doubt, men vastly differ: and we need
Some strange exceptional benevolence
Of nature's sunshine to develop seed
So well, in the less-favoured clime, that thence
We may discern how shrub means tree indeed
Though dwarfed till scarcely shrub in evidence.
Man in the ice-house or the hot-house ranks
With beasts or gods: stove-forced, give warmth the thanks!

XX.

While, is there any ice-checked? Such shall learn
I am thankworthy, who propose to slake
His thirst for tasting how it feels to turn
Cedar from hyssop-on-the-wall. I wake
No memories of what is harsh and stern
In ancient Croisic-nature, much less rake
The ashes of her last warmth till out leaps
Live Hervé Riel, the single spark she keeps.

XXI.

Take these two, see, each outbreak,—spirt and spirt
Of fire from our brave billet's either edge
Which—call maternal Croisic ocean-girt!
These two shall thoroughly redeem my pledge.
One flames fierce gules, its feebler rival—vert,
Heralds would tell you: heroes, I allege,
They both were: soldiers, sailors, statesmen, priests,
Lawyers, physicians—guess what gods or beasts!

XXII.

None of them all, but—poets, if you please!
"What, even there, endowed with knack of rhyme,
Did two among the aborigines
Of that rough region pass the ungracious time

Suiting, to rumble-tumble of the sea's,
The songs forbidden a serener clime?
Or had they universal audience—that 's
To say, the folk of Croisic, ay and Batz?"

XXIII.

Open your ears! Each poet in his day
Had such a mighty moment of success
As pinnacled him straight, in full display,
For the whole world to worship—nothing less!
Was not the whole polite world Paris, pray?
And did not Paris, for one moment—yes,
Worship these poet-flames, our red and green,
One at a time, a century between?

XXIV.

And yet you never heard their names! Assist,
Clio, Historic Muse, while I record
Great deeds! Let fact, not fancy, break the mist
And bid each sun emerge, in turn play lord
Of day, one moment! Hear the annalist
Tell a strange story, true to the least word!
At Croisic, sixteen hundred years and ten
Since Christ, forth flamed yon liquid ruby, then.

XXV.

Know him henceforth as René Gentilhomme
—Appropriate appellation! noble birth
And knightly blazon, the device wherefrom
Was "Better do than say"! In Croisic's dearth
Why prison his career while Christendom
Lay open to reward acknowledged worth?
He therefore left it at the proper age
And got to be the Prince of Condé's page.

XXVI.

Which Prince of Condé, whom men called "The Duke,"
—Failing the king, his cousin, of an heir,
(As one might hold would hap, without rebuke,
Since Anne of Austria, all the world was 'ware,
Twenty-three years long sterile, scarce could look
For issue)—failing Louis of so rare
A godsend, it was natural the Prince
Should hear men call him "Next King" too, nor wince.

XXVII.

Now, as this reasonable hope, by growth
Of years, nay, tens of years, looked plump almost
To bursting,—would the brothers, childless both,
Louis and Gaston, give but up the ghost—

Condé, called "Duke" and 'Next King," nothing loth
Awaited his appointment to the post,
And wiled away the time, as best he might,
Till Providence should settle things aright.

XXVIII.

So, at a certain pleasure-house, withdrawn
From cities where a whisper breeds offence,
He sat him down to watch the streak of dawn
Testify to first stir of Providence;
And, since dull country life makes courtiers yawn,
There wanted not a poet to dispense
Song's remedy for spleen-fits all and some,
Which poet was Page René Gentilhomme.

XXIX.

A poet born and bred, his very sire
A poet also, author of a piece
Printed and published, "Ladies—their attire":
Therefore the son, just born at his decease,
Was bound to keep alive the sacred fire,
And kept it, yielding moderate increase
Of songs and sonnets, madrigals, and much
Rhyming thought poetry and praised as such.

XXX.

Rubbish unutterable (bear in mind!)
Rubbish not wholly without value, though,
Being to compliment the Duke designed
And bring the complimenter credit so,—
Pleasure with profit happily combined.
Thus René Gentilhomme rhymed, rhymed till—lo,
This happened, as he sat in an alcove
Elaborating rhyme for "love"—*not* "dove."

XXXI.

He was alone: silence and solitude
Befit the votary of the Muse. Around,
Nature—not our new picturesque and rude,
But trim tree-cinctured stately garden-ground—
Breathed polish and politeness. All-imbued
With these, he sat absorbed in one profound
Excogitation "Were it best to hint
Or boldly boast 'She loves me,—Araminte'?"

XXXII.

When suddenly flashed lightning, searing sight
Almost, so close to eyes; then, quick on flash,
Followed the thunder, splitting earth downright
Where René sat a-rhyming: with huge crash

Of marble into atoms infinite—
Marble which, stately, dared the world to dash
The stone-thing proud, high-pillared, from its place:
One flash, and dust was all that lay at base.

XXXIII.

So, when the horrible confusion loosed
Its wrappage round his senses, and, with breath,
Seeing and hearing by degrees induced
Conviction what he felt was life, not death—
His fluttered faculties came back to roost
One after one, as fowls do: ay, beneath,
About his very feet there, lay in dust
Earthly presumption paid by heaven's disgust.

XXXIV.

For, what might be the thunder-smitten thing
But, pillared high and proud, in marble guise,
A ducal crown—which meant "Now Duke: Next,
King"?
Since such the Prince was, not in his own eyes
Alone, but all the world's. Pebble from sling
Prostrates a giant; so can pulverize
Marble pretension—how much more, make moult
A peacock-prince his plume—God's thunderbolt.

XXXV.

That was enough for René, that first fact
Thus flashed into him. Up he looked: all blue
And bright the sky above; earth firm, compact
Beneath his footing, lay apparent too;
Opposite stood the pillar: nothing lacked
There, but the Duke's crown: see, its fragments strew
The earth,—about his feet lie atoms fine
Where he sat nursing late his fourteenth line!

XXXVI.

So, for the moment, all the universe
Being abolished, all 'twixt God and him,—
Earth's praise or blame, its blessing or its curse,
Of one and the same value,—to the brim
Flooded with truth for better or for worse,—
He pounces on the writing-paper, prim,
Keeping its place on table: not a dint
Nor speck had damaged "Ode to Araminte."

XXXVII.

And over the neat crowquill calligraph
His pen goes blotting, blurring, as an ox
Tramples a flower-bed in a garden,—laugh
You may!—so does not he, whose quick heart knocks

Audibly at his breast: an epitaph
On earth's break-up, amid the falling rocks,
He might be penning in a wild dismay,
Caught with his work half-done on Judgment Day.

XXXVIII.

And what is it so terribly he pens,
Ruining "Cupid, Venus, wile and smile,
Hearts, darts," and all his day's *divinior mens*
Judged necessary to a perfect style?
Little recks René, with a breast to cleanse,
Of Rhadamanthine law that reigned erewhile:
Brimful of truth, truth's outburst will convince
(Style or no style) who bears truth's brunt—the Prince.

XXXIX.

"Condé, called 'Duke,' be called just 'Duke,' not more
To life's end! 'Next King' thou forsooth wilt be?
Ay, when this bauble, as it decked before
Thy pillar, shall again, for France to see,
Take its proud station there! Let France adore
No longer an illusive mock-sun—thee—
But keep her homage for Sol's self, about
To rise and put pretenders to the rout!

XL.

"What? France so God-abandoned that her root
Regal, though many a Spring it gave no sign,
Lacks power to make the bole, now branchless, shoot
Greenly as ever? Nature, though benign,
Thwarts ever the ambitious and astute.
In store for such is punishment condign:
Sure as thy Duke's crown to the earth was hurled,
So sure, next year, a Dauphin glads the world!"

XLI.

Which penned—some forty lines to this effect—
Our René folds his paper, marches brave
Back to the mansion, luminous, erect,
Triumphant, an emancipated slave.
There stands the Prince. "How now? My Duke's crown wrecked?
What may this mean?" The answer René gave
Was—handing him the verses, with the due
Incline of body: "Sir, God's word to you!"

XLII.

The Prince read, paled, was silent; all around,
The courtier-company, to whom he passed

The paper, read, in equal silence bound.
René grew also by degrees aghast
At his own fit of courage—palely found
Way of retreat from that pale presence: classed
Once more among the cony-kind. "Oh, son,
It is a feeble folk!" saith Solomon.

XLIII.

Vainly he apprehended evil: since,
When, at the year's end, even as foretold,
Forth came the Dauphin who discrowned the Prince
Of that long-craved mere visionary gold,
'T was no fit time for envy to evince
Malice, be sure! The timidest grew bold:
Of all that courtier-company not one
But left the semblance for the actual sun.

XLIV.

And all sorts and conditions that stood by
At René's burning moment, bright escape
Of soul, bore witness to the prophecy.
Which witness took the customary shape
Of verse; a score of poets in full cry
Hailed the inspired one. Nantes and Tours agape,
Soon Paris caught the infection; gaining strength,
How could it fail to reach the Court at length?

XLV.

"O poet!" smiled King Louis, "and besides,
O prophet! Sure, by miracle announced,
My babe will prove a prodigy. Who chides
Henceforth the unchilded monarch shall be trounced
For irreligion: since the fool derides
Plain miracle by which this prophet pounced
Exactly on the moment I should lift
Like Simeon, in my arms, a babe, 'God's gift!'

XLVI.

"So call the boy! and call this bard and seer
By a new title! him I raise to rank
Of 'Royal Poet:' poet without peer!
Whose fellows only have themselves to thank
If humbly they must follow in the rear
My René. He 's the master: they must clank
Their chains of song, confessed his slaves; for why?
They poetize, while he can prophesy!"

XLVII.

So said, so done; our René rose august,
"The Royal Poet;" straightway put in type
His poem-prophecy, and (fair and just
Procedure) added,—now that time was ripe

For proving friends did well his word to trust,—
Those attestations, tuned to lyre or pipe,
Which friends broke out with when he dared foretell
The Dauphin's birth: friends trusted, and did well.

XLVIII.

Moreover he got painted by Du Pré,
Engraved by Daret also, and prefixed
The portrait to his book: a crown of bay
Circled his brows, with rose and myrtle mixed;
And Latin verses, lovely in their way,
Described him as "the biforked hill betwixt:
Since he hath scaled Parnassus at one jump,
Joining the Delphic quill and Getic trump."

XLIX.

Whereof came . . . What, it lasts, our spirt, thus long
—The red fire? That 's the reason must excuse
My letting flicker René's prophet-song
No longer; for its pertinacious hues
Must fade before its fellow joins the throng
Of sparks departed up the chimney, dues
To dark oblivion. At the word, it winks,
Rallies, relapses, dwindles, deathward sinks!

L.

So does our poet. All this burst of fame,
Fury of favour, Royal Poetship,
Prophetship, book, verse, picture—thereof came
—Nothing! That 's why I would not let outstrip
Red his green rival flamelet: just the same
Ending in smoke waits both! In vain we rip
The past, no further faintest trace remains
Of René to reward our pious pains.

LI.

Somebody saw a portrait framed and glazed
At Croisic. "Who may be this glorified
Mortal unheard-of hitherto?" amazed
That person asked the owner by his side,
Who proved as ignorant. The question raised
Provoked inquiry; key by key was tried
On Croisic's portrait-puzzle, till back flew
The wards at one key's touch, which key was—Who?

LII.

The other famous poet! Wait thy turn.
Thou green, our red's competitor! Enough
Just now to note 't was he that itched to learn
(A hundred years ago) how fate could puff

Heaven-high (a hundred years before) then spurn
To suds so big a bubble in some huff:
Since green too found red's portrait,—having heard
Hitherto of red's rare self not one word.

LIII.

And he with zeal addressed him to the task
Of hunting out, by all and any means,
—Who might the brilliant bard be, born to bask
Butterfly-like in shine which kings and queens
And baby-dauphins shed? Much need to ask!
Is fame so fickle that what perks and preens
The eyed wing, one imperial minute, dips
Next sudden moment into blind eclipse?

LIV.

After a vast expenditure of pains,
Our second poet found the prize he sought:
Urged in his search by something that restrains
From undue triumph famed ones who have fought,
Or simply, poetizing, taxed their brains:
Something that tells such—dear is triumph bought
If it means only basking in the midst
Of fame's brief sunshine, as thou, René, didst.

LV.

For, what did searching find at last but this?
  Quoth somebody "I somehow somewhere seem
To think I heard one old De Chevaye is
  Or was possessed of René's works!" which gleam
Of light from out the dark proved not amiss
  To track, by correspondence on the theme;
And soon the twilight broadened into day,
For thus to question answered De Chevaye.

LVI.

"True it is, I did once possess the works
  You want account of—works—to call them so,—
Comprised in one small book: the volume lurks
  (Some fifty leaves *in duodecimo*)
'Neath certain ashes which my soul it irks
  Still to remember, because long ago
That and my other rare shelf-occupants
Perished by burning of my house at Nantes.

LVII.

"Yet of that book one strange particular
  Still stays in mind with me"—and thereupon
Followed the story. "Few the poems are;
  The book was two-thirds filled up with this one,

And sundry witnesses from near and far
That here at least was prophesying done
By prophet, so as to preclude all doubt,
Before the thing he prophesied about."

LVIII.

That's all he knew, and all the poet learned,
And all that you and I are like to hear
Of René; since not only book is burned
But memory extinguished,—nay, I fear,
Portrait is gone too: nowhere I discerned
A trace of it at Croisic. "Must a tear
Needs fall for that?" you smile. "How fortune fares
With such a mediocrity, who cares?"

LIX.

Well, I care—intimately care to have
Experience how a human creature felt
In after-life, who bore the burden grave
Of certainly believing God had dealt
For once directly with him: did not rave
—A maniac, did not find his reason melt
—An idiot, but went on, in peace or strife,
The world's way, lived an ordinary life.

LX.

How many problems that one fact would solve!
An ordinary soul, no more, no less,
About whose life earth's common sights revolve,
On whom is brought to bear, by thunder-stress,
This fact—God tasks him, and will not absolve
Task's negligent performer! Can you guess
How such a soul,—the task performed to point,—
Goes back to life nor finds things out of joint?

LXI.

Does he stand stock-like henceforth? or proceed
Dizzily, yet with course straightforward still,
Down-trampling vulgar hindrance?—as the reed
Is crushed beneath its tramp when that blind will
Hatched in some old-world beast's brain bids it speed
Where the sun wants brute-presence to fulfil
Life's purpose in a new far zone, ere ice
Enwomb the pasture-tract its fortalice

LXII

I think no such direct plain truth consists
With actual sense and thought and what they take
To be the solid walls of life: mere mists—
How such would, at that truth's first piercing, break

Into the nullity they are!—slight lists
Wherein the puppet-champions wage, for sake
Of some mock-mistress, mimic war: laid low
At trumpet-blast, there 's shown the world, one foe!

LXIII.

No, we must play the pageant out, observe
The tourney-regulations, and regard
Success—to meet the blunted spear nor swerve,
Failure—to break no bones yet fall on sward;
Must prove we have—not courage? well then,—nerve!
And, at the day's end, boast the crown's award—
Be warranted as promising to wield
Weapons, no sham, in a true battle-field.

LXIV.

Meantime, our simulated thunderclaps
Which tell us counterfeited truths—these same
Are—sound, when music storms the soul, perhaps?
—Sight, beauty, every dart of every aim
That touches just, then seems, by strange relapse,
To fall effectless from the soul it came
As if to fix its own, but simply smote
And startled to vague beauty more remote?

LXV.

So do we gain enough—yet not too much—
Acquaintance with that outer element
Wherein there 's operation (call it such !)
Quite of another kind than we the pent
On earth are proper to receive. Our hutch
Lights up at the least chink : let roof be rent—
How inmates huddle, blinded at first spasm,
Cognizant of the sun's self through the chasm !

LXVI.

Therefore, who knows if this our René's quick
Subsidence from as sudden noise and glare
Into oblivion was impolitic ?
No doubt his soul became at once aware
That, after prophecy, the rhyming-trick
Is poor employment : human praises scare
Rather than soothe ears all a-tingle yet
With tones few hear and live, but none forget.

LXVII.

There 's our first famous poet. Step thou forth
Second consummate songster ! See, the tongue
Of fire that typifies thee, owns thy worth
In yellow, purple mixed its green among,

No pure and simple resin from the North,
But composite with virtues that belong
To Southern culture! Love not more than hate
Helped to a blaze . . . But I anticipate.

LXVIII.

Prepare to witness a combustion rich
And riotously splendid, far beyond
Poor René's lambent little streamer which
Only played candle to a Court grown fond
By baby-birth: this soared to such a pitch,
Alternately such colours doffed and donned,
That when I say it dazzled Paris—please
Know that it brought Voltaire upon his knees!

LXIX.

Who did it, was a dapper gentleman,
Paul Desforges Maillard, Croisickese by birth,
Whose birth that century ended which began
By similar bestowment on our earth
Of the aforesaid René. Cease to scan
The ways of Providence! See Croisic's dearth—
Not Paris in its plenitude—suffice
To furnish France with her best poet twice!

LXX.

Till he was thirty years of age, the vein
Poetic yielded rhyme by drops and spirts:
In verses of society had lain
His talent chiefly; but the Muse asserts
Privilege most by treating with disdain
Epics the bard mouths out, or odes he blurts
Spasmodically forth. Have people time
And patience nowadays for thought in rhyme?

LXXI.

So, his achievements were the quatrain's inch
Of homage, or at most the sonnet's ell
Of admiration: welded lines with clinch
Of ending word and word, to every belle
In Croisic's bounds; these, brisk as any finch,
He twittered till his fame had reached as well
Guérande as Batz; but there fame stopped, for—curse
On fortune—outside lay the universe!

LXXII.

That 's Paris. Well,—why not break bounds, and send
Song onward till it echo at the gates
Of Paris whither all ambitions tend,
And end too, seeing that success there sates

The soul which hungers most for fame? Why spend
A minute in deciding, while, by Fate's
Decree, there happens to be just the prize
Proposed there, suiting souls that poetize?

LXXIII.

A prize indeed, the Academy's own self
Proposes to what bard shall best indite
A piece describing how, through shoal and shelf,
The Art of Navigation, steered aright,
Has, in our last king's reign,—the lucky elf,—
Reached, one may say, Perfection's haven quite,
And there cast anchor. At a glance one sees
The subject's crowd of capabilities!

LXXIV.

Neptune and Amphitrité! Thetis, who
Is either Tethys or as good—both tag!
Triton can shove along a vessel too:
It 's Virgil! Then the winds that blow or lag,—
De Maille, Vendôme, Vermandois! Toulouse blew
Longest, we reckon: he must puff the flag
To fullest outflare; while our lacking nymph
Be Anne of Austria, Regent o'er the lymph

LXXV.

Promised, performed! Since *irritabilis gens*
Holds of the feverish impotence that strives
To stay an itch by prompt resource to pen's
Scratching itself on paper; placid lives,
Leisurely works mark the *divinior mens:*
Bees brood above the honey in their hives;
Gnats are the busy bustlers. Splash and scrawl,—
Completed lay thy piece, swift penman Paul!

LXXVI.

To Paris with the product! This despatched,
One had to wait the Forty's slow and sure
Verdict, as best one might. Our penman scratched
Away perforce the itch that knows no cure
But daily paper-friction: more than matched
His first feat by a second – tribute pure
And heartfelt to the Forty when their voice
Should peal with one accord "Be Paul our choice!"

LXXVII.

Scratch, scratch went much laudation of that sane
And sound Tribunal, delegates august
Of Phœbus and the Muses' sacred train—
Whom every poetaster tries to thrust

From where, high-throned, they dominate the Seine:
Fruitless endeavour,—fail it shall and must!
Whereof in witness have not one and all
The Forty voices pealed "Our Choice be Paul"?

LXXVIII.

Thus Paul discounted his applause. Alack
For human expectation! Scarcely ink
Was dry when, lo, the perfect piece came back
Rejected, shamed! Some other poet's clink
"Thetis and Tethys" had seduced the pack
Of pedants to declare perfection's pink
A singularly poor production. "Whew!
The Forty are stark fools, I always knew."

LXXIX.

First fury over (for Paul's race—to-wit,
Brain-vibrios—wriggle clear of protoplasm
Into minute life that 's one fury-fit),
"These fools shall find a bard's enthusiasm
Comports with what should counterbalance it—
Some knowledge of the world! No doubt, orgasm
Effects the birth of verse which, born, demands
Prosaic ministration, swaddling-bands!

LXXX.

"Verse must be cared for at this early stage,
Handled, nay dandled even. I should play
Their game indeed if, till it grew of age,
I meekly let these dotards frown away
My bantling from the rightful heritage
Of smiles and kisses! Let the public say
If it be worthy praises or rebukes,
My poem, from these Forty old perukes!"

LXXXI.

So, by a friend, who boasts himself in grace
With no less than the Chevalier La Roque,—
Eminent in those days for pride of place,
Seeing he had it in his power to block
The way or smooth the road to all the race
Of literators trudging up to knock
At Fame's exalted temple-door—for why?
He edited the Paris "Mercury":—

LXXXII.

By this friend's help the Chevalier receives
Paul's poem, prefaced by the due appeal
To Cæsar from the Jews. As duly heaves
A sigh the Chevalier, about to deal

With case so customary—turns the leaves,
Finds nothing there to borrow, beg or steal—
Then brightens up the critic's brow deep-lined.
"The thing may be so cleverly declined!"

LXXXIII.

Down to desk, out with paper, up with quill,
Dip and indite! "Sir, gratitude immense
For this true draught from the Pierian rill!
Our Academic clodpoles must be dense
Indeed to stand unirrigated still.
No less, we critics dare not give offence
To grandees like the Forty: while we mock
We grin and bear. So, here's your piece! La Roque.

LXXXIV.

"There now!" cries Paul: "the fellow can't avoid
Confessing that my piece deserves the palm;
And yet he dares not grant me space enjoyed
By every scribbler he permits embalm
His crambo in the Journal's corner! Cloyed
With stuff like theirs, no wonder if a qualm
Be caused by verse like mine: though that's no cause
For his defrauding me of just applause.

LXXXV.

"Aha, he fears the Forty, this poltroon?
First let him fear *me!* Change smooth speech to rough!
I 'll speak my mind out, show the fellow soon
Who is the foe to dread: insist enough
On my own merits till, as clear as noon,
He sees I am no man to take rebuff
As patiently as scribblers may and must!
Quick to the onslaught, out sword, cut and thrust!"

LXXXVI.

And thereupon a fierce epistle flings
Its challenge in the critic's face. Alack!
Our bard mistakes his man! The gauntlet rings
On brazen visor proof against attack.
Prompt from his editorial throne up springs
The insulted magnate, and his mace falls, thwack,
On Paul's devoted brainpan,—quite away
From common courtesies of fencing-play!

LXXXVII.

"Sir, will you have the truth? This piece of yours
Is simply execrable past belief.
I shrank from saying so; but, since nought cures
Conceit but truth, truth 's at your service! Brief,

Just so long as 'The Mercury' endures,
So long are you excluded by its Chief
From corner, nay, from cranny! Play the cock
O' the roost, henceforth, at Croisic!" wrote La Roque.

LXXXVIII.

Paul yellowed, whitened, as his wrath from red
Waxed incandescent. Now, this man of rhyme
Was merely foolish, faulty in the head
Not heart of him: conceit 's a venial crime.
"Oh by no means malicious!" cousins said:
Fussily feeble,—harmless all the time,
Piddling at so-called satire—well-advised,
He held in most awe whom he satirized.

LXXXIX.

Accordingly his kith and kin—removed
From emulation of the poet's gift
By power and will—these rather liked, nay, loved
The man who gave his family a lift
Out of the Croisic level; "disapproved
Satire so trenchant." Thus our poet sniffed
Home-incense, though too churlish to unlock
"The Mercury's" box of ointment was La Roque.

XC.

But when Paul's visage grew from red to white,
And from his lips a sort of mumbling fell
Of who was to be kicked,—"And serve him right"—
A gay voice interposed—"did kicking well
Answer the purpose! Only—if I might
Suggest as much—a far more potent spell
Lies in another kind of treatment. Oh,
Women are ready at resource, you know!

XCI.

"Talent should minister to genius! Good:
The proper and superior smile returns.
Hear me with patience! Have you understood
The only method whereby genius earns
Fit guerdon nowadays? In knightly mood
You entered lists with visor up; one learns
Too late that, had you mounted Roland's crest,
'Room!' they had roared—La Roque with all the rest!

XCII.

"Why did you first of all transmit your piece
To those same priggish Forty unprepared
Whether to rank you with the swans or geese
By friendly intervention? If they dared

Count you a cackler,—wonders never cease!
I think it still more wondrous that you bared
Your brow (my earlier image) as if praise
Were gained by simple fighting nowadays!

XCIII.

"Your next step showed a touch of the true means
Whereby desert is crowned: not force but wile
Came to the rescue. 'Get behind the scenes!'
Your friend advised: he writes, sets forth your style
And title, to such purpose intervenes
That you get velvet-compliment three-pile;
And, though 'The Mercury' said 'nay,' nor stock
Nor stone did his refusal prove La Roque.

XCIV.

"Why must you needs revert to the high hand,
Imperative procedure—what you call
'Taking on merit your exclusive stand'?
Stand, with a vengeance! Soon you went to wall,
You and your merit! Only fools command
When folk are free to disobey them, Paul!
You 've learnt your lesson, found out what 's o'clock,
By this uncivil answer of La Roque.

XCV.

"Now let me counsel! Lay this piece on shelf
—Masterpiece though it be! From out your desk
Hand me some lighter sample, verse the elf
Cupid inspired you with, no god grotesque
Presiding o'er the Navy! I myself
Hand-write what 's legible yet picturesque;
I 'll copy fair and femininely frock
Your poem masculine that courts La Roque!

XCVI.

"Deïdamia he—Achilles thou!
Ha, ha, these ancient stories come so apt!
My sex, my youth, my rank I next avow
In a neat prayer for kind perusal. Sapped
I see the walls which stand so stoutly now!
I see the toils about the game entrapped
By honest cunning! Chains of lady's-smock,
Not thorn and thistle, tether fast La Roque!"

XCVII.

Now, who might be the speaker sweet and arch
That laughed above Paul's shoulder as it heaved
With the indignant heart?—bade steal a march
And not continue charging? Who conceived

This plan which set our Paul, like pea you parch
On fire-shovel, skipping, of a load relieved,
From arm-chair moodiness to escritoire
Sacred to Phœbus and the tuneful choir?

XCVIII.

Who but Paul's sister! named of course like him
"Desforges"; but, mark you, in those days a queer
Custom obtained,—who knows whence grew the whim?—
That people could not read their title clear
To reverence till their own true names, made dim
By daily mouthing, pleased to disappear,
Replaced by brand-new bright ones: Arouet,
For instance, grew Voltaire; Desforges Malcrais.

XCIX.

"Demoiselle Malcrais de la Vigne"—because
The family possessed at Brederac
A vineyard,– few grapes, many hips-and-haws,—
Still a nice Breton name. As breast and back
Of this vivacious beauty gleamed through gauze,
So did her sprightly nature nowise lack
Lustre when draped, the fashionable way,
In "Malcrais de la Vigne"—more short, "Malcrais."

C.

Out from Paul's escritoire behold escape
The hoarded treasure! verse falls thick and fast,
Sonnets and songs of every size and shape.
The lady ponders on her prize; at last
Selects one which—Oh angel and yet ape!—
Her malice thinks is probably surpassed
In badness by no fellow of the flock,
Copies it fair, and "Now for my La Roque!"

CI.

So, to him goes, with the neat manuscript,
The soft petitionary letter. "Grant
A fledgeling novice that with wing unclipt
She soar her little circuit, habitant
Of an old manor; buried in which crypt,
How can the youthful châtelaine but pant
For disemprisonment by one *ad hoc*
Appointed 'Mercury's' Editor, La Roque?"

CII.

'T was an epistle that might move the Turk!
More certainly it moved our middle-aged
Pen-driver drudging at his weary work,
Raked the old ashes up and disengaged

The sparks of gallantry which always lurk
Somehow in literary breasts, assuaged
In no degree by compliments on style;
Are Forty wagging beards worth one girl's smile?

CIII.

In trips the lady's poem, takes its place
Of honour in the gratified Gazette,
With due acknowledgment of power and grace;
Prognostication, too, that higher yet
The Breton Muse will soar: fresh youth, high race,
Beauty and wealth have amicably met
That Demoiselle Malcrais may fill the chair
Left vacant by the loss of Deshoulières.

CIV.

"There!" cried the lively lady. "Who was right—
You in the dumps, or I the merry maid
Who know a trick or two can baffle spite
Tenfold the force of this old fool's? Afraid
Of Editor La Roque? But come! next flight
Shall outsoar—Deshoulières alone? My blade,
Sappho herself shall you confess outstript!
Quick, Paul, another dose of manuscript!"

CV.

And so, once well a-foot, advanced the game:
More and more verses, corresponding gush
On gush of praise, till everywhere acclaim
Rose to the pitch of uproar. "Sappho? Tush!
Sure 'Malcrais on her Parrot' puts to shame
Deshoulières' pastoral, clay not worth a rush
Beside this find of treasure, gold in crock,
Unearthed in Brittany,—nay, ask La Roque!"

CVI.

Such was the Paris tribute. "Yes," you sneer,
"Ninnies stock Noodledom, but folk more sage
Resist contagious folly, never fear!"
Do they? Permit me to detach one page
From the huge Album which from far and near
Poetic praises blackened in a rage
Of rapture! and that page shall be—who stares
Confounded now, I ask you?—just Voltaire's!

CVII.

Ay, sharpest shrewdest steel that ever stabbed
To death Imposture through the armour-joints!
How did it happen that gross Humbug grabbed
Thy weapons, gouged thine eyes out? Fate appoints

That pride shall have a fall, or I had blabbed
Hardly that Humbug, whom thy soul aroints,
Could thus cross-buttock thee caught unawares,
And dismalest of tumbles proved—Voltaire's!

CVIII.

See his epistle extant yet, wherewith
"Henri" in verse and "Charles" in prose he sent
To do her suit and service! Here 's the pith
Of half a dozen stanzas—stones which went
To build that simulated monolith—
Sham love in due degree with homage blent
As sham—which in the vast of volumes scares
The traveller still: "That stucco-heap—Voltaire's?"

CIX.

"Oh thou, whose clarion-voice has overflown
The wilds to startle Paris that 's one ear!
Thou who such strange capacity hast shown
For joining all that 's grand with all that 's dear,
Knowledge with power to please—Deshoulières grown
Learned as Dacier in thy person! mere
Weak fruit of idle hours, these crabs of mine
I dare lay at thy feet, O Muse divine!

CX.

"Charles was my taskwork only; Henri trod
My hero erst; and now, my heroine—she
Shall be thyself! True—is it true, great God?
Certainly love henceforward must not be!
Yet all the crowd of Fine Arts fail—how odd!—
Tried turn by turn, to fill a void in me!
There 's no replacing love with these, alas!
Yet all I can I do to prove no ass.

CXI.

"I labour to amuse my freedom; but
Should any sweet young creature slavery preach,
And—borrowing thy vivacious charm, the slut!—
Make me, in thy engaging words, a speech,
Soon should I see myself in prison shut
With all imaginable pleasure." Reach
The washhand-basin for admirers! There 's
A stomach-moving tribute—and Voltaire's!

CXII.

Suppose it a fantastic billet-doux,
Adulatory flourish, not worth frown!
What say you to the Fathers of Trévoux?
These in their Dictionary have her down

Under the heading "Author": "Malcrais, too,
Is 'Author' of much verse that claims renown."
While Jean-Baptiste Rousseau . . . but why proceed?
Enough of this—something too much, indeed!

CXIII.

At last La Roque, unwilling to be left
Behindhand in the rivalry, broke bounds
Of figurative passion; hilt and heft,
Plunged his huge downright love through what surrounds
The literary female bosom; reft
Away its veil of coy reserve with "Zounds!
I love thee, Breton Beauty! All's no use!
Body and soul I love,—the big word's loose!"

CXIV.

He's greatest now and to de-struc-ti-on
Nearest. Attend the solemn word I quote,
O Paul! *There's no pause at per-fec-ti-on.*
Thus knolls thy knell the Doctor's bronzed throat!
Greatness a period hath, no sta-ti-on!
Better and truer verse none ever wrote
(Despite the antique outstretched *a-i-on*)
Than thou, revered and magisterial Donne!

CXV.

Flat on his face, La Roque, and,—pressed to heart
His dexter hand,—Voltaire with bended knee!
Paul sat and sucked-in triumph; just apart
Leaned over him his sister. "Well!" smirks he,
And "Well?" she answers, smiling—woman's art
To let a man's own mouth, not hers, decree
What shall be next move which decides the game:
Success? She said so. Failure? His the blame.

CXVI.

"Well!" this time forth affirmatively comes
With smack of lip, and long-drawn sigh through teeth
Close clenched o'er satisfaction, as the gums
Were tickled by a sweetmeat teased beneath
Palate by lubricating tongue: "Well! crumbs
Of comfort these, undoubtedly! no death
Likely from famine at Fame's feast! 't is clear
I may put claim in for my pittance, Dear!

CXVII.

"La Roque, Voltaire, my lovers! Then disguise
Has served its turn, grows idle; let it drop!
I shall to Paris, flaunt there in men's eyes
My proper manly garb and mount a-top

The pedestal that waits me, take the prize
Awarded Hercules. He threw a sop
To Cerberus who let him pass, you know,
Then, following, licked his heels: exactly so!

CXVIII.

"I like the prospect—their astonishment,
Confusion: wounded vanity, no doubt,
Mixed motives; how I see the brows quick bent!
'What, sir, yourself, none other, brought about
This change of estimation? Phœbus sent
His shafts as from Diana?' Critic pout
Turns courtier smile: 'Lo, him we took for her!
Pleasant mistake! You bear no malice, sir?'

CXIX.

"Eh, my Diana?" But Diana kept
Smilingly silent with fixed needle-sharp
Much-meaning eyes that seemed to intercept
Paul's very thoughts ere they had time to warp
From earnest into sport the words they leapt
To life with—changed as when maltreated harp
Renders in tinkle what some player-prig
Means for a grave tune though it proves a jig.

CXX.

"What, Paul, and are my pains thus thrown away,
My lessons end in loss?" at length fall slow
The pitying syllables, her lips allay
The satire of by keeping in full flow,
Above their coral reef, bright smiles at play:
"Can it be, Paul thus fails to rightly know
And altogether estimate applause
As just so many asinine hee-haws?

CXXI.

"I thought to show you". . . "Show me," Paul in broke
"My poetry is rubbish, and the world
That rings with my renown a sorry joke!
What fairer test of worth than that, form furled,
I entered the arena? Yet you croak
Just as if Phœbé and not Phœbus hurled
The dart and struck the Python! What, he crawls
Humbly in dust before your feet, not Paul's?

CXXII.

"Nay, 't is no laughing matter though absurd
If there 's an end of honesty on earth!
La Roque sends letters, lying every word!
Voltaire makes verse, and of himself makes mirth

To the remotest age! Rousseau 's the third
Who, driven to despair amid such dearth
Of people that want praising, finds no one
More fit to praise than Paul the simpleton!

CXXIII.

"Somebody says—if a man writes at all
It is to show the writer's kith and kin
He was unjustly thought a natural;
And truly, sister, I have yet to win
Your favourable word, it seems, for Paul
Whose poetry you count not worth a pin
Though well enough esteemed by these Voltaires,
Rousseaus and suchlike: let them quack, who cares?"

CXXIV.

"—To Paris with you, Paul! Not one word's waste
Further: my scrupulosity was vain!
Go triumph! Be my foolish fears effaced
From memory's record! Go, to come again
With glory crowned,—by sister re-embraced,
Cured of that strange delusion of her brain
Which led her to suspect that Paris gloats
On male limbs mostly when in petticoats!"

CXXV.

So laughed her last word, with the little touch
Of malice proper to the outraged pride
Of any artist in a work too much
Shorn of its merits. "By all means be tried
The opposite procedure! Cast your crutch
Away, no longer crippled, nor divide
The credit of your march to the World's Fair
With sister Cherry-cheeks who helped you there!"

CXXVI.

Crippled, forsooth! what courser sprightlier pranced
Paris-ward than did Paul? Nay, dreams lent wings:
He flew, or seemed to fly, by dreams entranced.
Dreams? wide-awake realities: no things
Dreamed merely were the missives that advanced
The claim of Malcrais to consort with kings
Crowned by Apollo — not to say with queens
Cinctured by Venus for Idalian scenes.

CXXVII.

Soon he arrives, forthwith is found before
The outer gate of glory. Bold tic-toc
Announces there 's a giant at the door.
"Ay, sir, here dwells the Chevalier La Roque."

"Lackey! Malcrais,—mind, no word less nor more!—
Desires his presence. I 've unearthed the brock:
Now, to transfix him!" There stands Paul erect,
Inched out his uttermost, for more effect.

CXXVIII.

A bustling entrance: "Idol of my flame!
Can it be that my heart attains at last
Its longing? that you stand, the very same
As in my visions? . . . Ha! hey, how?" aghast
Stops short the rapture. "Oh, my boy 's to blame!
You merely are the messenger! Too fast
My fancy rushed to a conclusion. Pooh!
Well, sir, the lady's substitute is—who?"

CXXIX.

Then Paul's smirk grows inordinate. "Shake hands!
Friendship not love awaits you, master mine,
Though nor Malcrais nor any mistress stands
To meet your ardour! So, you don't divine
Who wrote the verses wherewith ring the land's
Whole length and breadth? Just he whereof no line
Had ever leave to blot your Journal—eh?
Paul Desforges Maillard—otherwise Malcrais!"

CXXX.

And there the two stood, stare confronting mirk,
Awhile uncertain which should yield the *pas*.
In vain the Chevalier beat brain for quirk
To help in this conjuncture; at length "Bah!
Boh! Since I 've made myself a fool, why shirk
The punishment of folly? Ha, ha, ha,
Let me return your handshake!" Comic sock
For tragic buskin prompt thus changed La Roque.

CXXXI.

"I 'm nobody—a wren-like journalist;
You 've flown at higher game and winged your bird,
The golden eagle! That 's the grand acquist!
Voltaire's sly Muse, the tiger-cat, has purred
Prettily round your feet; but if she missed
Priority of stroking, soon were stirred
The dormant spit-fire. To Voltaire! away,
Paul Desforges Maillard, otherwise Malcrais!"

CXXXII.

Whereupon, arm in arm, and head in air,
The two begin their journey. Need I say,
La Roque had felt the talon of Voltaire,
Had a long-standing little debt to pay,

And pounced, you may depend, on such a rare
Occasion for its due discharge? So, gay
And grenadier-like, marching to assault,
They reach the enemy's abode, there halt.

CXXXIII.

"I 'll be announcer!" quoth La Roque: "I know,
Better than you, perhaps, my Breton bard,
How to procure an audience! He 's not slow
To smell a rat, this scamp Voltaire! Discard
The petticoats too soon,—you 'll never show
Your *haut-de-chausses* and all they 've made or marred
In your true person. Here 's his servant. Pray,
Will the great man see Demoiselle Malcrais?"

CXXXIV.

Now, the great man was also, no whit less,
The man of self-respect,—more great man he!
And bowed to social usage, dressed the dress,
And decorated to the fit degree
His person; 't was enough to bear the stress
Of battle in the field, without, when free
From outside foes, inviting friends' attack
By—sword in hand? No,—ill-made coat on back!

CXXXV.

And, since the announcement of his visitor
Surprised him at his toilet,—never glass
Had such solicitation! "Black, now—or
Brown be the killing wig to wear? Alas,
Where 's the rouge gone, this cheek were better for
A tender touch of? Melted to a mass,
All my pomatum! There 's at all events
A devil—for he 's got among my scents!"

CXXXVI.

So, "barbered ten times o'er," as Antony
Paced to his Cleopatra, did at last
Voltaire proceed to the fair presence: high
In colour, proud in port, as if a blast
Of trumpet bade the world "Take note! draws nigh
To Beauty, Power! Behold the Iconoclast,
The Poet, the Philosopher, the Rod
Of iron for imposture! Ah my God!"

CXXXVII.

For there stands smirking Paul, and—what lights fierce
The situation as with sulphur flash—
There grinning stands La Roque! No carte-and-tierce
Observes the grinning fencer, but, full dash

From breast to shoulderblade, the thrusts transpierce
That armour against which so idly clash
The swords of priests and pedants! Victors there,
Two smirk and grin who have befooled—Voltaire!

CXXXVIII.

A moment's horror; then quick turn-about
On high-heeled shoe,—flurry of ruffles, flounce
Of wig-ties and of coat-tails,—and so out
Of door banged wrathfully behind, goes—bounce—
Voltaire in tragic exit! vows, no doubt,
Vengeance upon the couple. Did he trounce
Either, in point of fact? His anger's flash
Subsided if a culprit craved his cash.

CXXXIX.

As for La Roque, he having laughed his laugh
To heart's content,—the joke defunct at once,
Dead in the birth, you see,—its epitaph
Was sober earnest. "Well, sir, for the nonce,
You 've gained the laurel; never hope to graff
A second sprig of triumph there! Ensconce
Yourself again at Croisic: let it be
Enough you mastered both Voltaire and—me!

CXL.

"Don't linger here in Paris to parade
Your victory, and have the very boys
Point at you! 'There 's the little mouse which made
Believe those two big lions that its noise,
Nibbling away behind the hedge, conveyed
Intelligence that—portent which destroys
All courage in the lion's heart, with horn
That 's fable—there lay couched the unicorn!'

CXLI.

"Beware us, now we 've found who fooled us! Quick
To cover! 'In proportion to men's fright,
Expect their fright's revenge!' quoth politic
Old Macchiavelli. As for me,—all 's right:
I 'm but a journalist. But no pin's prick
The tooth leaves when Voltaire is roused to bite!
So, keep your counsel, I advise! Adieu!
Good journey! Ha, ha, ha, Malcrais was—you!"

CXLII.

"—Yes, I 'm Malcrais, and somebody beside,
You snickering monkey!" thus winds up the tale
Our hero, safe at home, to that black-eyed
Cherry-cheeked sister, as she soothes the pale

Mortified poet. "Let their worst be tried,
I'm their match henceforth—very man and male!
Don't talk to me of knocking-under! man
And male must end what petticoats began!

CXLIII.

"How woman-like it is to apprehend
The world will eat its words! why, words transfixed
To stone, they stare at you in print,—at end,
Each writer's style and title! Choose betwixt
Fool and knave for his name, who should intend
To perpetrate a baseness so unmixed
With prospect of advantage! What is writ
Is writ: they 've praised me, there 's an end of it.

CXLIV.

"No, Dear, allow me! I shall print these same
Pieces, with no omitted line, as Paul's.
Malcrais no longer, let me see folk blame
What they—praised simply?—placed on pedestals,
Each piece a statue in the House of Fame!
Fast will they stand there, though their presence galls
The envious crew: such show their teeth, perhaps
And snarl, but never bite! I know the chaps!"

CXLV.

Oh Paul, oh piteously deluded ! Pace
Thy sad sterility of Croisic flats,
Watch, from their southern edge, the foamy race
Of high-tide as it heaves the drowning mats
Of yellow-berried web-growth from their place,
The rock-ridge, when, rolling as far as Batz,
One broadside crashes on it, and the crags,
That needle under, stream with weedy rags !

CXLVI.

Or, if thou wilt, at inland Bergerac,
Rude heritage but recognized domain,
Do as two here are doing : make hearth crack
With logs until thy chimney roar again
Jolly with fire-glow ! Let its angle lack
No grace of Cherry-cheeks thy sister, fain
To do a sister's office and laugh smooth
Thy corrugated brow—that scowls forsooth !

CXLVII.

Wherefore ? Who does not know how these La Roques,
Voltaires, can say and unsay, praise and blame,
Prove black white, white black, play at paradox
And, when they seem to lose it, win the game ?

Care not thou what this badger, and that fox,
His fellow in rascality, call "fame!"
Fiddlepin's end! Thou hadst it, — quack, quack
quack!
Have quietude from geese at Bergerac!

CXLVIII.

Quietude! For, be very sure of this!
A twelvemonth hence, and men shall know or care
As much for what to-day they clap or hiss
As for the fashion of the wigs they wear,
Then wonder at. There 's fame which, bale or bliss, —
Got by no gracious word of great Voltaire
Or not-so-great La Roque, – is taken back
By neither, any more than Bergerac!

CXLIX.

Too true! or rather, true as ought to be!
No more of Paul the man, Malcrais the maid,
Thenceforth for ever! One or two, I see,
Stuck by their poet: who the longest stayed
Was Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, and even he
Seemingly saddened as perforce he paid
A rhyming tribute "After death, survive —
He hoped he should; and died while yet alive!"

CL.

No, he hoped nothing of the kind, or held
His peace and died in silent good old age.
Him it was, curiosity impelled
To seek if there were extant still some page
Of his great predecessor, rat who belled
The cat once, and would never deign engage
In after-combat with mere mice,—saved from
More sonnetteering,—René Gentilhomme.

CLI.

Paul's story furnished forth that famous play
Of Piron's "Métromanie": there you'll find
He's Francaleu, while Demoiselle Malcrais
Is Demoiselle No-end-of-names-behind!
As for Voltaire, he's Damis. Good and gay
The plot and dialogue, and all's designed
To spite Voltaire: at "Something" such the laugh
Of simply "Nothing!" (see his epitaph).

CLII.

But truth, truth, that's the gold! and all the good
I find in fancy is, it serves to set
Gold's inmost glint free, gold which comes up rude
And rayless from the mine. All fume and fret

Of artistry beyond this point pursued
Brings out another sort of burnish: yet
Always the ingot has its very own
Value, a sparkle struck from truth alone.

CLIII.

Now, take this sparkle and the other spirt
Of fitful flame,—twin births of our grey brand
That's sinking fast to ashes! I assert,
As sparkles want but fuel to expand
Into a conflagration no mere squirt
Will quench too quickly, so might Croisic strand,
Had Fortune pleased posterity to chowse,
Boast of her brace of beacons luminous.

CLIV.

Did earlier Agamemnons lack their bard?
But later bards lacked Agamemnon too!
How often frustrate they of fame's award
Just because Fortune, as she listed, blew
Some slight bark's sails to bellying, mauled and marred
And forced to put about the First-rate! True,
Such tacks but for a time: still—small-craft ride
At anchor, rot while Beddoes breasts the tide!

CLV.

Dear, shall I tell you? There 's a simple test
Would serve, when people take on them to weigh
The worth of poets, "Who was better, best,
This, that, the other bard?" (bards none gainsay
As good, observe! no matter for the rest)
"What quality preponderating may
Turn the scale as it trembles?" End the strife
By asking "Which one led a happy life?"

CLVI.

If one did, over his antagonist
That yelled or shrieked or sobbed or wept or wailed
Or simply had the dumps,—dispute who list,—
I count him victor. Where his fellow failed,
Mastered by his own means of might,—acquist
Of necessary sorrows,—he prevailed,
A strong since joyful man who stood distinct
Above slave-sorrows to his chariot linked.

CLVII.

Was not his lot to feel more? What meant "feel"
Unless to suffer! Not, to see more? Sight—
What helped it but to watch the drunken reel
Of vice and folly round him, left and right,

One dance of rogues and idiots! Not, to deal
More with things lovely? What provoked the spite
Of filth incarnate, like the poet's need
Of other nutriment than strife and greed!

CLVIII.

Who knows most, doubts most; entertaining hope,
Means recognizing fear; the keener sense
Of all comprised within our actual scope
Recoils from aught beyond earth's dim and dense.
Who, grown familiar with the sky, will grope
Henceforward among groundlings? That 's offence
Just as indubitably: stars abound
O'erhead, but then—what flowers make glad the ground!

CLIX.

So, force is sorrow, and each sorrow, force:
What then? since Swiftness gives the charioteer
The palm, his hope be in the vivid horse
Whose neck God clothed with thunder, not the steer
Sluggish and safe! Yoke Hatred, Crime, Remorse,
Despair: but ever mid the whirling fear,
Let, through the tumult, break the poet's face
Radiant, assured his wild slaves win the race!

CLX.

Therefore I say . . . no, shall not say, but think,
And save my breath for better purpose. White
From grey our log has burned to: just one blink
That quivers, loth to leave it, as a sprite
The outworn body. Ere your eyelids' wink
Punish who sealed so deep into the night
Your mouth up, for two poets dead so long,—
Here pleads a live pretender: right your wrong!

I.

What a pretty tale you told me
Once upon a time
—Said you found it somewhere (scold me!)
Was it prose or was it rhyme,
Greek or Latin? Greek, you said,
While your shoulder propped my head.

II.

Anyhow there 's no forgetting
This much if no more,
That a poet (pray, no petting !)
Yes, a bard, sir, famed of yore,
Went where suchlike used to go,
Singing for a prize, you know.

III.

Well, he had to sing, nor merely
Sing but play the lyre ;
Playing was important clearly
Quite as singing : I desire,
Sir, you keep the fact in mind
For a purpose that 's behind.

IV.

There stood he, while deep attention
Held the judges round,
—Judges able, I should mention,
To detect the slightest sound
Sung or played amiss : such ears
Had old judges, it appears !

V

None the less he sang out boldly,
Played in time and tune,
Till the judges, weighing coldly
Each note's worth, seemed, late or soon,
Sure to smile "In vain one tries
Picking faults out: take the prize!"

VI

When, a mischief! Were they seven
Strings the lyre possessed?
Oh, and afterwards eleven,
Thank you! Well, sir,—who had guessed
Such ill luck in store?—it happed
One of those same seven strings snapped.

VII.

All was lost, then! No! a cricket
(What "cicada"? Pooh!)
—Some mad thing that left its thicket
For mere love of music—flew
With its little heart on fire,
Lighted on the crippled lyre.

VIII.

So that when (ah joy!) our singer
For his truant string
Feels with disconcerted finger,
What does cricket else but fling
Fiery heart forth, sound the note
Wanted by the throbbing throat?

IX.

Ay and, ever to the ending,
Cricket chirps at need,
Executes the hand's intending,
Promptly, perfectly,—indeed
Saves the singer from defeat
With her chirrup low and sweet.

X.

Till, at ending, all the judges
Cry with one assent
"Take the prize—a prize who grudges
Such a voice and instrument?
Why, we took your lyre for harp,
So it shrilled us forth F sharp!"

XI.

Did the conqueror spurn the creature,
Once its service done?
That 's no such uncommon feature
In the case when Music's son
Finds his Lotte's power too spent
For aiding soul-development.

XII.

No! This other, on returning
Homeward, prize in hand,
Satisfied his bosom's yearning:
(Sir, I hope you understand!)
—Said "Some record there must be
Of this cricket's help to me!"

XIII.

So, he made himself a statue:
Marble stood, life-size;
On the lyre, he pointed at you
Perched his partner in the prize;
Never more apart you found
Her, he throned, from him, she crowned.

XIV.

That 's the tale: its application?
Somebody I know
Hopes one day for reputation
Through his poetry that 's—Oh,
All so learned and so wise
And deserving of a prize!

XV.

If he gains one, will some ticket,
When his statue 's built,
Tell the gazer " 'T was a cricket
Helped my crippled lyre, whose tilt
Sweet and low, when strength usurped
Softness' place i' the scale, she chirped?

XVI.

" For as victory was nighest,
While I sang and played,—
With my lyre at lowest, highest,
Right alike,—one string that made
' Love ' sound soft was snapt in twain,
Never to be heard again,—

XVII.

"Had not a kind cricket fluttered,
Perched upon the place
Vacant left, and duly uttered
'Love, Love, Love,' whene'er the bass
Asked the treble to atone
For its somewhat sombre drone."

XVIII.

But you don't know music! Wherefore
Keep on casting pearls
To a—poet? All I care for
Is—to tell him that a girl's
"Love" comes aptly in when gruff
Grows his singing. (There, enough!)

END OF THE FOURTEENTH VOLUME.

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